



Robert Owen

t r a n s i t s

George Alexander

t r a n s i t s

n. passing, passage, journey
v. (of heavenly body) make transit (across)





Robert Owen

t r a n s i t s

George Alexander



Wagga Wagga City Art Gallery
New South Wales

Selected Works

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and Robert Owen

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FRONT COVER:
Hiatus #2, 1987
Installation: "Easy Science"
United Artists Gallery Melbourne
talcum powder and light
127 x 86 cm

BACK COVER:
Untitled, 1985
photograph: chair and light
Air and Space Studio, London

FRONTISPIECE:
A Warring Peace, A Sweet Wound,
A Mild Evil, 1988
Installation view, Institute of Modern
Art Brisbane
Floor: glass, Tibetan bowl, light, jasmine
essence, 2 metres diameter
Wall: galvanized iron, acrylic, gold leaf,
ambient sound tape, 8.5 x 13.5 x 2560 cm.

Contents

9	Introduction Michael Goss
	George Alexander
11	1. Transparencies
13	2. Re Beginnings
17	3. The Shadow Science
22	4. Longitude 180° East or West
28	5. The Technology of Appearances
33	6. Paradiso
37	7. The Book of Changes
43	8. Biotech Rehearsals for Leaving the Body
49	9. Stories, Stones, Stars
55	10. Transmissions
56	References
59	Exhibitions, Bibliography, Collections
63	Acknowledgements

For Lisa

Introduction

Until very recently artists in Australia, whether they intended to or not, defined themselves in terms of overseas art practice. Ironically, the most 'Australian' of Australian artists from Streeton to Nolan, Tucker and Boyd sought recognition in London, Paris and New York. Confirmation of identity came from outside Australia rather than from within.

Robert Owen is one of a growing number of outstanding Australian artists who are consciously choosing a very different national context for their lives and work as artists. For them the centre of art is no longer a particular city or country overseas but is increasingly any and every place in the world that provides a context for their work.

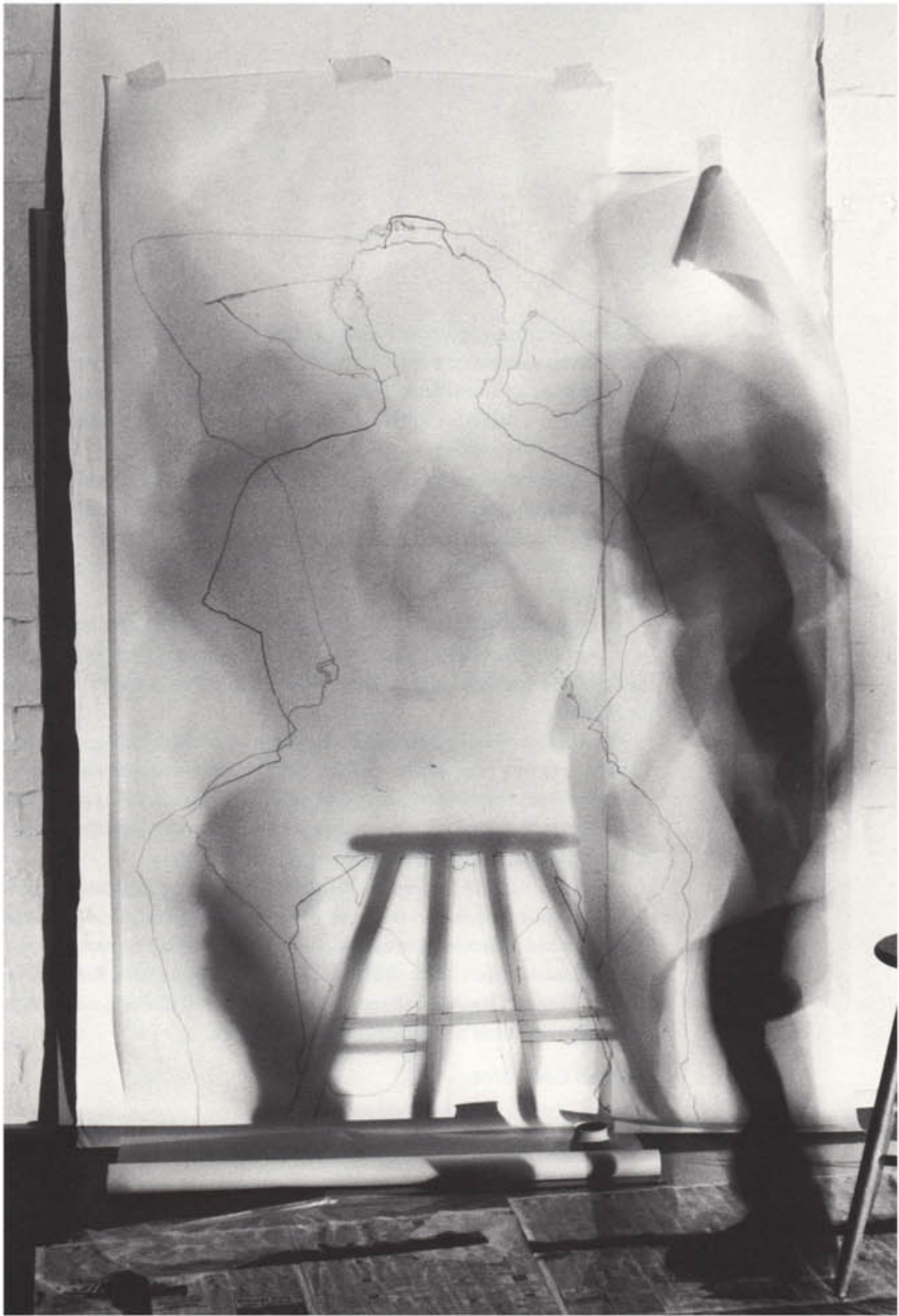
It's not just that Robert Owen comes from Wagga Wagga, has many friends there and has been very supportive of its Gallery and art school; Wagga Wagga is as valid and relevant a place for an artist to work and exhibit as Edinburgh, Venice or Mildura.

That Robert has worked and exhibited in all of these and many other places is indicative of a regionalism that has nothing to do with provincialism. Quite the opposite, it represents a maturity and professionalism in his approach to being an artist, where the work and its context is more important than the notice or status it might receive in a particular art centre, city or gallery.

As major cultural institutions continue to grow they inevitably become more formal in their response to the work of living artists. The role of the small public art museums and galleries in commissioning and exhibiting contemporary art becomes, in my opinion, much more vital. At this time and place both Robert Owen and the Wagga Wagga City Art Gallery should be congratulated and encouraged for this exhibition and their willingness to work together.

Michael Goss, OAM

Executive Officer, Regional Galleries Association
of New South Wales Limited.



1. Transparencies

In an age of systemised critical scrutiny Robert Owen has been a kind of Invisible Artist. He is both there and not there, present, and absent. There has been no ready type role for him among today's historians of reputation. This is chiefly a consequence of the nature of the work itself: it doesn't add to the chatter of images, like painting or video; its passion is not homeopathic or violent, rather we are moved by contemplation; and none of those hard-won disciplines like psychoanalysis or linguistics can elaborate it. Robert Owen's work resists elaboration as stubbornly as a statement like, "Moonlight is sculpture; sunlight is painting".

Over the last thirty years art criticism has been a constant rush of exits from endgames, attitudes to art changing more dynamically than art itself. Styles come and feel like they have the advantage of some group standard, but then quickly become obsolete, because experienced as overgrown. Old handles, like Concept Art, Eco Art, Earth Art, Neo-Expressionist, Neo-Geo etc become larger and softer than what they handle. Or else, prescriptive critics, themselves overwhelmed by the ideological enormities of our time, belabour artists for not putting out the nightmare like a snuffer on a candle.

Owen's work is neither psychological nor ideological and what's more it doesn't proceed by way of the Western attitude to knowledge (i.e., Socratic and appropriative). It belongs rather to an other, underground tradition, whose efforts, perhaps, are to reach that zone, by definition indescribable and incommunicable, in which meanings disappear, bodies volatilise and earthly stones are celestialised. It is likely, however, that through this kind of art (Owen belongs to an extended family that begins with the Hermetic-Gnostic work of Duchamp and Malevich, and continues with Yves Klein, Joseph Beuys, and more recently, Eric Orr, Wolfgang Laib, Simone Mangos, Joan Grounds) we are already formulating more suitable epistemological structures for coping with the 21st century.

* * *

"Moonlight is sculpture; sunlight is painting". Here the language of a writer (Nathaniel Hawthorne) is employed to make sense of the imagination of the artist. To make the conversation possible with these works, I have to approach elliptically. Though I shall provide some chronological keys in this monograph, my aim is to discover a *poetics of thinking* that is immanent to the work. The

FACING PAGE:
*Notes to Myself: Drawing for
Prometheus Blue*, 1982.

Full Moon (Trying to Write My Name),
1985
photograph.



language for talking with Robert Owen is Robert Owen, just as the language for talking to the TV set is TV. Given time the work does assume intelligible contours and his entire oeuvre (at least since 1976) begins to reveal a poetic instrument as clear and concentrated as a printed circuit. Owen's assemblages (paintings, sculptures, drawings, photographs, installations) compel out of otherwise mute objects: jars, stones, graphite, windows, pigments, scrap metal, chairs – new ways of re-wiring the world, of “curing” space and the bodies that pass through it.

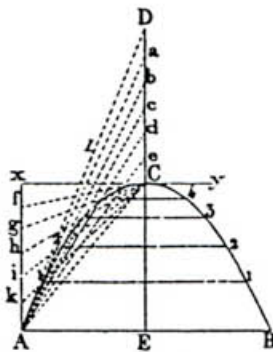
In making sense (and not making sense) of Robert Owen's kinetics of consciousness, I've found myself having to devise a couple of neologisms to describe it;

TOPOPOEIA: defined as the dance of the intellect among objects in space. Such as the ironical play at work in his quick-witted sculpture, assembled from scraps of machine parts, and make to look like Buddhist stupas or radar stations.

ASTROPOETICS: describes the artist's way of planetarising stones in the progressive non-resistance of matter to light, such as we see in *Apposition*, *Prometheus Blue* or *Turn of the Moon*.

But before the work one drops the critical calculus. Imagination, writes Guy Davenport, “is like a drunk man who has lost his watch and must get drunk again to find it”.

2. Re Beginnings



In their struggle with reality some visual artists try and violate it, or obscure it with signs, sidestep it or bury it. Robert Owen volatilises it. It isn't blood (or dirt or Ideas), but light that flows through its body.

Marcel Duchamp, self-professed *respirateur*, wrote that since a 3-D object casts a 2-D shadow, "we should be able to imagine the unknown 4-D object whose shadow we are",

These are the dimensions Robert Owen works within: the material and the immaterial changing places, the senses are made plastic, and objects become lamps clearing a path to the 4th dimension. Hence stones take on transparency and become stars, and stars are made from scrap from a junkyard. Light, in these works becomes fixed, material, fallen under a heavy weight; light transmits pigment, and pigment becomes liquid. Is this Mars or Arcadia?

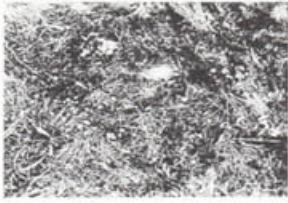
Duchamp was born in Blainville, a small village in France. Owen hails from Wagga Wagga. This is not irrelevant (Duchamp called the *Large Glass*, an agricultural machine). Born in 1937 Owen's first significant acts of perception took place two miles out of Wagga on the Albury-Wodonga Road. It happened between those two institutions, school and home. It was in the paddocks surrounded by wheatfields, where the mythic mode of communication would have currency. Recent time and prehistoric time align forces, human time is stretched to geological time in the imagination of the child. Myths permit us to express intuitions without shaving off the ears and nose of an experience.

In 1977, reflecting back on 1947, Owen made a work about this place:



Slaughter House, 1975
photograph.

... it had an unused quality. I was about ten and until I left school it was a place where I would while away the time with what went on there. In the top corner, where the sun went down stood a shed with a cement floor and walls open between the tin roof, where iron hooks hung. Buckets and tubs lay upside down under the wooden benches covered with galvanised iron, and a tap, which always leaked, hung under a 'Trespassers Will Be Prosecuted'. Once or twice a year a sign of death was there, when the paddock's eerie stillness centred on the crows flapping around the shed's damp and scrubbed silence, while skins hung inside-out along the barbed-wire fence. Mostly though, I never bothered about the shed, it just stood over there in the shadow of the sun. About one hundred yards to the east, in a cluster of trees, I would lie in the grass watching clouds in the shifting light. A little to the north-west stood three trees in a row. Whenever



OUTSIDE



INSIDE



ENCLOSED



OUTSIDE

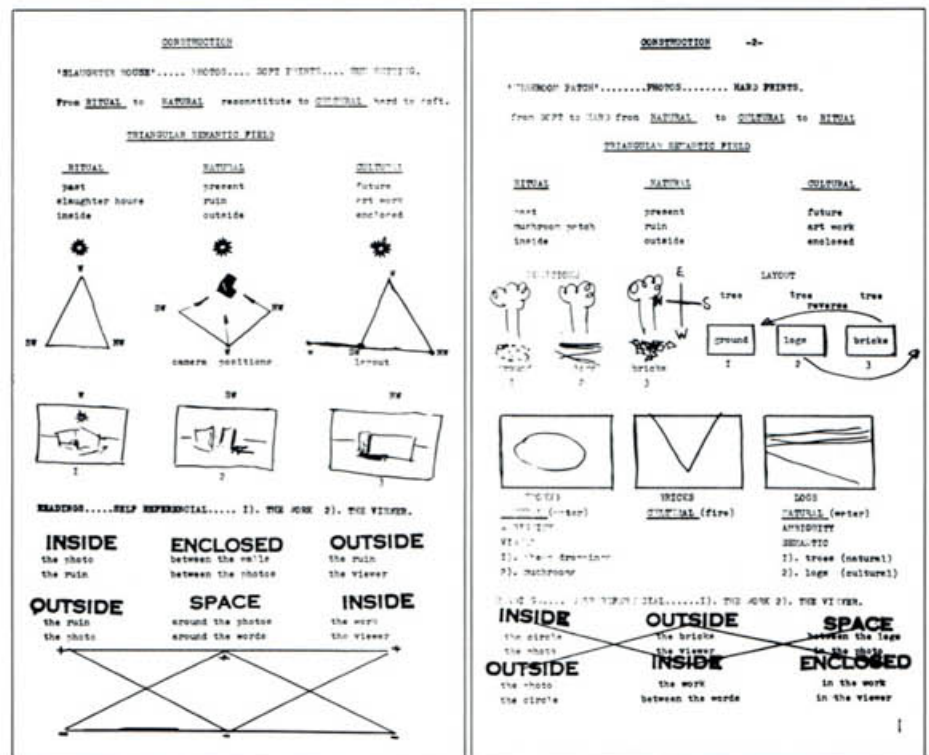


SPACE



INSIDE

From *Notes To Myself*, 1977.



it rained, mushrooms grew all around them and if I hadn't been out there for a couple of days, they'd be as big as saucers.

The later realisation that the blood from the slaughterhouse might also have contributed to the growth of mushrooms, makes this passage feel like Whitman laced with Poe.

Wagga Wagga was childhood filled with wonder, full of visions. Childhood wild with the terror of itself. Like two aboriginal girls who stand together and ask the mysterious question. Truth and the dream so mingle in their eyes you couldn't tell which of the two had spoken. But the child in the paddocks understands those moments when time made sense of nothingness. Light becomes leaf becomes coal becomes light. The blood-soaked seasonal fungus springs from the soil to become a lotus.

In the work, *Mushroom Patch* and *Slaughter House*, both rituals of food gathering, the 10-year-old boy is re-united with the 40-year-old man. The ruins of the slaughterhouse become figurations of blessedness: a profane culture's system of death begins to look like a Druidic Temple or a henge of stones whose configuration of columns and lintels are so arranged as to align with the sun-moon declinations, lining up axes for a dozen celestial positions. Here Owen is not trying to embody the greatest possible union between his position on earth and the cyclical events of celestial bodies, rather there is a kind of curing of space. This is done by a reversal of the layout, i.e. of the *content* (logs, bricks, ground) and of the

FACING PAGE:

Phototype: Memory and Logic Units - Mushroom Patch, 1975-77

ink and photograph on paper, 37.5 x 93 cm
Collection of the Mildura City Art Gallery, Victoria.

Phototype: Memory and Logic Units - Slaughter House, 1975-77

ink and photograph on paper, 37.5 x 93 cm
Collection of the Mildura City Art Gallery, Victoria.



Ghost Gum, 1952,
(After Namatjira)
watercolour 30 x 22 cm.

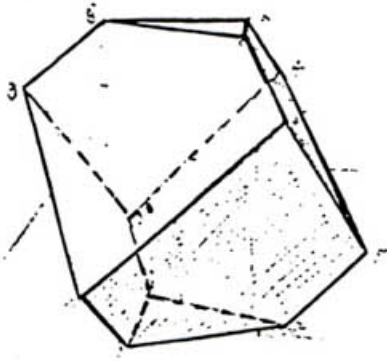
camera positions (south-west, west, north-west). Here the structuralist Levi-Strauss joins the Kabbalistic calculations that try and reconcile opposites, in order to recover a part of oneself, a part walled in, obscured, from the very beginning of the beginning – and open it to the infinite. “The human condition”, wrote Octavio Paz, “is perhaps not merely *human*”.

Later still in Wagga, Owen was to make his first paintings, copies of the Aranda landscapes of Albert Namatjira. The aboriginal artist that Imants Tillers has pointed out, shares the same birth date as Marcel Duchamp! Ironies abound: Namatjira learnt to show his love of the land by hijacking a white pictorial landscape idiom from ‘gumtree’ artist Rex Battarbee. Owen in turn shows his love of art by copying Namatjira. The circulation of energies here recalls the series of true or false crossings from one part of the spiral of memory to the other, that leads to the feeling we describe as *deja vu*.

This is our contemporary dilemma: how do we connect the sacred to the non-sacred in our culture? There has been an enormous disinvestment of spirit in this country since the arrival of the white people. The unity of the Earth is overtaken by the unity of the State. Just as aborigines have striven to maintain their complex metaphysical systems within a secular-capitalist society, artists too have been feeling like clan members who have lost their totemic system. And yet artist after artist – from non-objective artists like Mondrian and Kandinsky, to Suprematists Malevich and Larianov, to Klein, to Beuys, have believed that the act of imagination can carry a spiritual charge across what a technocratic society believes are exhausted electric terminals. Can art keep evolving sign systems with the flexibility of a language without words? Can art maintain some secret sense of animistic correspondences, or has its pilot light gone out?

Nevertheless, with the fierce determination of left-handed art, Robert Owen thoroughly investigates the mystery of the relationship between objects and consciousness, how a given external object is transmuted into that internal, immaterial thing which is as intimate to ourselves as we ourselves are.

3. The Shadow Science



Detail: Truncated cube
Albrecht Durer, 1514.

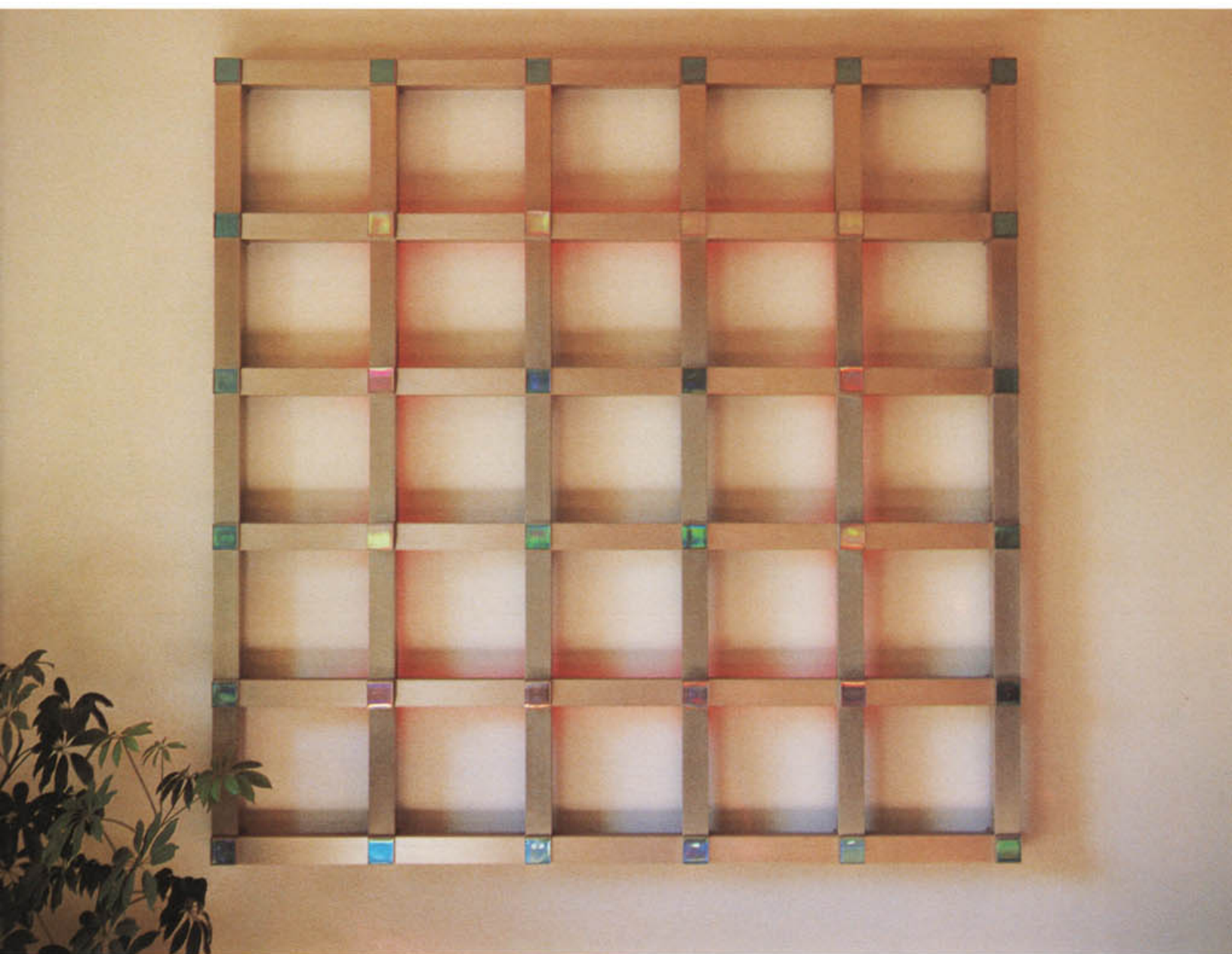
It can be argued that art is a form of knowledge, of experimental knowledge. Robert Owen has described his art as 'science of consciousness'. This involves an extension of present knowledges, of older visionary traditions, with first-hand plastic accounts of a sensory investigation of nature, of crystals and colours, light effects, time relations and situations in space. His themes include astronomy, physics, physiology, design. For over a decade and a half, he has tried out microscopic and telescopic, infra-red and ultra-violet glimpses of consciousness.

Owen's work comes with notes, sometimes cryptograms, odd jottings, diagrams on scraps. And like those kits for building planes or harpsichords, intricacy is no objection, patience a demand and even unreadable plans can be a kind of pleasure. In a way they are not merely an adjunct to the work, they *are* the work. It is work to consult, not just to look at, like the notes to Duchamp's twelve year project *The Large Glass (The Bride Stripped Bare by her Bachelors, Even)*. Owen's themes overlap with Duchamp's as well: electricity, eroticism, transformation, 4-dimensions, n-dimensions, shadows and castings. They formed what he called an "amusing physics", and recalls Alfred Jarry's '*pataphysics*', the science of imaginary solutions, a shadow science based on exceptions; in 1987 Robert Owen's exhibition was titled *Easy Science*.

The advent of atomic physics and quantum mechanics has brought *hard* science up against problems that recall stoic field theory and alchemy. Jean-



Detail: Melancholia
Albrecht Durer, 1514
monogram, 24.8 x 19 cm.



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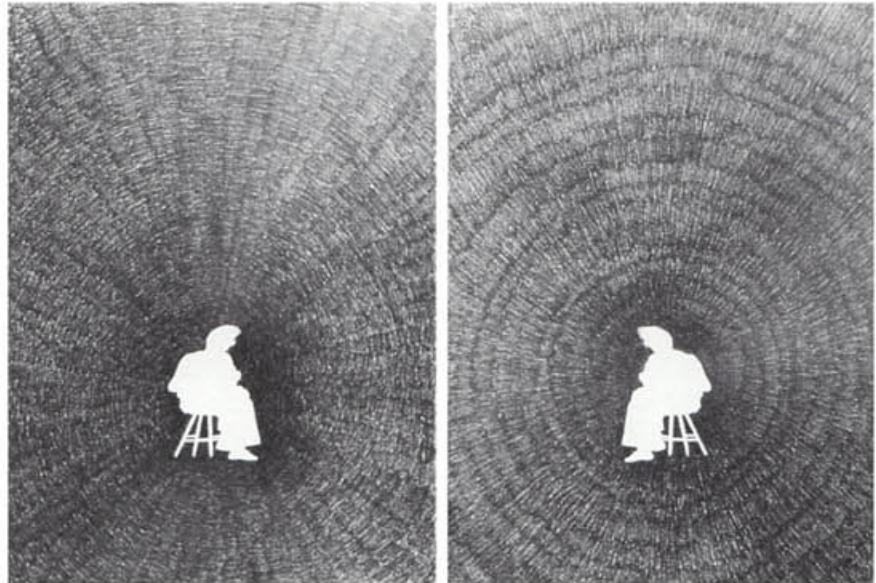
Orion, 1970-71

oil, aluminium, perspex and oroglass,
182 x 182 x 12.5 cm
Collection New Parliament House,
Canberra.

RIGHT:

Untitled (Prometheus and Nietzsche)
for Gunter, 1983

pencil on arche paper, 121.5 x 83.5 cm.

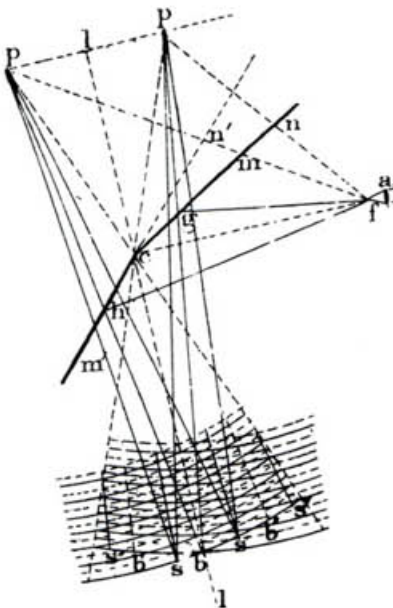


Francois Lyotard's *Les Immatériaux* exhibition of 1985 tested art against postindustrial technoscience. The extended range of the suprasensible and subsensible base lends itself to a science closer to Zosimus than to Gallileo in some fundamental aspects. Material and immaterial are in a state of transposition.

"If I ever practised alchemy", wrote Duchamp, "it was in the only way it can be done now, that is to say, without knowing it". Yves Klein, Joseph Beuys, Anselm Kiefer, Jannis Kounellis... belong in part to a dissident pantheist-materialist tradition, concerned with actual process, with the structure and laws of the nodal points in material change. They recall the secret world of craft-fraternities and mystery groups who are often prosecuted as counterfeiters (lead to gold) and with meddling in matters strictly reserved for the State or the Church.

For the artist this shadow science – with its osmosis between matter and action – is predicated on a belief structure which operates under the guise of a continual investigation of art. It has its equations, beyond our inequations.

Alchemy itself was a kind of model-making, seeking invariant factors in process that need not be timeless, but may consist in a universal tendency towards a defined end condition. Atoms, protons and electrons become notational models of ultra-high frequencies. In a work from the early 70s, Owen uses the grid (the Modernist focusing-device par excellence). The painting-sculpture is an intersection of smoothly collimated beams of brushed aluminium reflected or refracted with fluorescent shadows. Diffraction grating at the connections, make this relief construction both an icon of chemical bonding and a Tantric mandala. Objects like these in Owen's work are both formalist-minimalist and symbolic, they stand-in-themselves as objects (in their *Dasein*, Heidegger would say), but also carry a presence or 'aura' that floats off, reconciling opposites: horizontal/





FACING PAGE:

Holding Down A Shadow (for George Alexander with reference to Perseus), 1985

encaustic and lead on timber, lead sheet, wooden stool and gold leaf on cast iron, 81 x 12 x 12 cm

vertical, male/female, painting/sculpture, science/art, presence/absence, reality and the idea.

Owen's 'easy science' is a Jungian adventure, with the works a metaphor for the psychological process for attaining higher consciousness or healing split-states by way of 'chymical nuptials' of mercurial brides and sulphurous bachelors. At the same time, Owen's airy nature is earthed: 'easy science' is a combination of alchemy and that *bricolage*-science of the eye and hand, describing Levi-Strauss' "logic of the concrete" of primitive societies: that 'know-how' in a do-it-yourself kind of pottering that fastens on to the world. This radical empiricism leads paradoxically to a diffuse animism. It heals the gap between a mythical or artistic consciousness of the world, and a philosophic, scientific, theoretic consciousness of the world.

Andre Breton: "The Philosopher's Stone is nothing more nor less than that which was to enable man's imagination to take a stunning revenge on things".

Site of the Labyrinth of Language,
Les Immatériaux 1985

Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris 1985.



4. Longitude 180° East or West



Francesco Clemente represents one of the latest artists to look to the East, drawn to its mystical systems and cosmologies. These continuing cross-cultural impregnations help us re-examine the roots of our own aesthetics, and our notions of time (Burmese tenses mix present and past); perspective (Hiroshige's was inverse and boundless); space (empty space is not emptiness); consciousness (divided into 'ordinary' and 'a-consciousness').

Changing these parameters must re-arrange the ratio of our senses too. Take the perception of colour. What if colours had speed? Would red run on short legs? What if the interior reality of colours were absolutely unrelated to their exterior realities? If the retina sees green but some hidden part of you sensed purple? Like the other seeing that gets done by the blind. The spiritual body might be colour-blind to the physical body. And if we saw blue in our souls at the same time as we saw blue in nature, the short-circuit between mind and body, could make us swallow our tongues. Yves Klein: "Pure existential space was regularly winking at me. The sensation of total freedom attracted me so powerfully that I painted some monochrome surfaces just to 'see'...". In 1957 – Owen would be 20 – Yves Klein talked about the immaterialisation of blue, "the coloured space that cannot be seen but which we impregnate ourselves with". This was after a trip to the East – Klein's father was Dutch-Malaysian.

Following the example of other artists who have leapt off the Western-scientific part of the sensory spectrum, Owen has assimilated, among others: Whitler's free interpretations of Zen in his Nocturnes of the 1870s – Blue and Silver, Blue and Green, Blue and Gold or Black and Gold." "A splash and splatter of brightness on a black ground to depict a display of fireworks."

Larianov's *Blue Rayanism* (1913) depending on the notion of invisible energy:

... the total of invisible rays emitted by object A is intercepted by object B. The form created by the painter appears to our eyes within the limits of the space situated between these two objects... The rays which emanate from the objects and cross over one another give rise to Rayonist forms.

The Russians of this period tested the plastic qualities of painting, trying to reconstitute the initial moment of visual sensation before cognition overtakes perception. Here is Malevich writing *Resolution "A" in A* (1919):

FACING PAGE:
Signals, 1987
Wall: acrylic and mica on canvas,
247 x 180 cm
Floor: acrylic on mixed media,
273 x 33 x 33 cm
Collection: Art Gallery of Western
Australia, Perth.





"Prime Meridian of the World",
Greenwich, England, 1985.

To recognise light as the colour of rays whose invention contains a metallic basis is a correlation of economic developments. To relate the sun as a bonfire of illumination to the system of the vegetable world of flesh and bone.

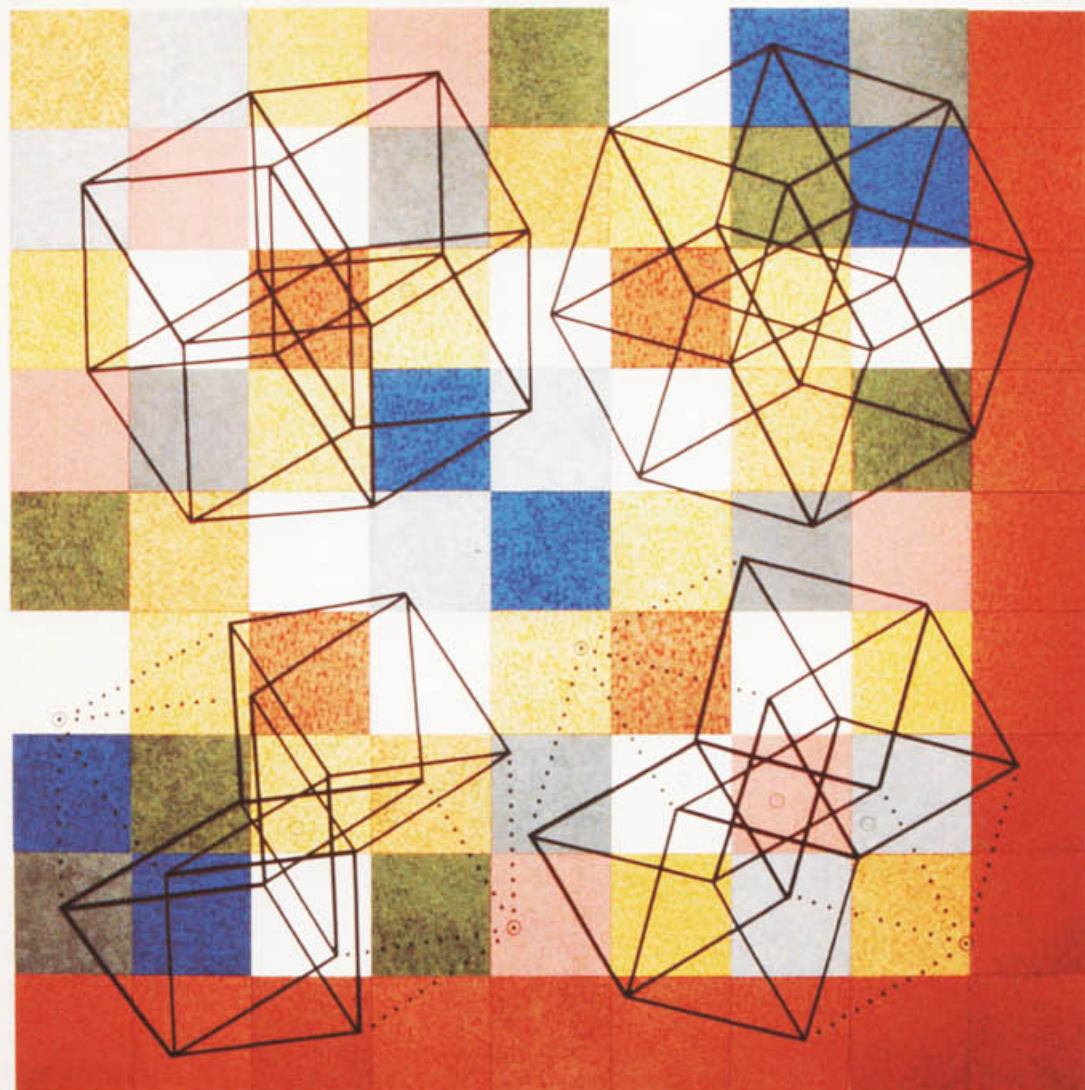
The investigation continued with Kandinsky, who believed in the internal resonances of colours, and Klee who thought light capable of colour movement. With Mondrian we approach another aspect of occult philosophy: having distilled down to the barest painterly elements, with primary colours in dynamic equilibrium, the artist is reconciling geometry and natural number theory with the forces of creation itself. The use of theosophical ideas and the Kabbala were very much a part of early 20th century art history, the artist's safety-valve against looming technocracy. Furthermore, the lessons of the paleo-Christian Greeks, the Taoists, the Tantric Buddhists, showed that they had no fear of the awesome contact that reconciles body, earth and cosmos.

In the East the outside is interiority itself; in the West, we have morality, the great isolator that divides humans and their activities in half. The Western attitude – grimy with the moral texture of the world – is unwholesome. The East has *karma*, the Hindu law of action and reaction. The subtle workings of destiny migrate like birds attaching themselves to the life force. Karma leads, moves, takes, follows, binds, releases, never resting. In the East respiration is metaphysics, everything flows and shuttles the way our lungs do. Subtle bodies breathe solar and lunar, ascend or descend vortices. The human body is dismembered into an unending sequence of animal and vegetative forms, each closed in its own perfection or held in stasis of erotic intensity. Not as in the West, seeking the truth

RIGHT:
From *Notes to Myself: Prometheus Blue*
No. 8, 1982
ink and marker on paper 37 x 27 cm.

FACING PAGE:
Re-vision (Melancholia), 1987
Wall: acrylic, mica and tape on 81 canvas
boards, 274 x 274 cm
Floor: wood, sand and formica,
48 x 48 x 200 cm.





of sex, but in order to link sexuality to higher consciousness. Yin Yang is its form as frozen movement, the torsion-form of sexual embrace. In the East, Death can be fended off by the person who reverses the flow of energy within the body. Energy flow can be reversed by postures, by 'seals', by 'drawing up', by breath control and meditation.

For artists like Klein and Beuys art is a tool in a psycho-cosmic process of channeling energy. Art is Being, Doing, Living. Robert Owen, in his way, desires to make art a metaphor of extra-sensory experience, as well as a plastic research into the senses. In his works objects are enigmatic, while at the same time enjoying the extratemporal persistence of objects: a stone, a tuning fork (8 times 8 octaves), a leaking goblet, a painted shadow, an ear-ring clip, a lead table, a transformer. They become special objects – are given AURA – that epiphanic halo or penumbra that is unique here-and-nowness, but evokes the other-worldly as well. Biting on actualities in one's personal life (love, marriage, loss, joy, death) but whose arrangement makes them tools for meditation, exorcism, transformation. Time folds over *now*, lays flat, transparent, upon *not-now*: "the dying echo of whence it came to us (and) the dawning sense of whither it is to lead".

For Robert Owen, Yin Yang is Easter VHF.

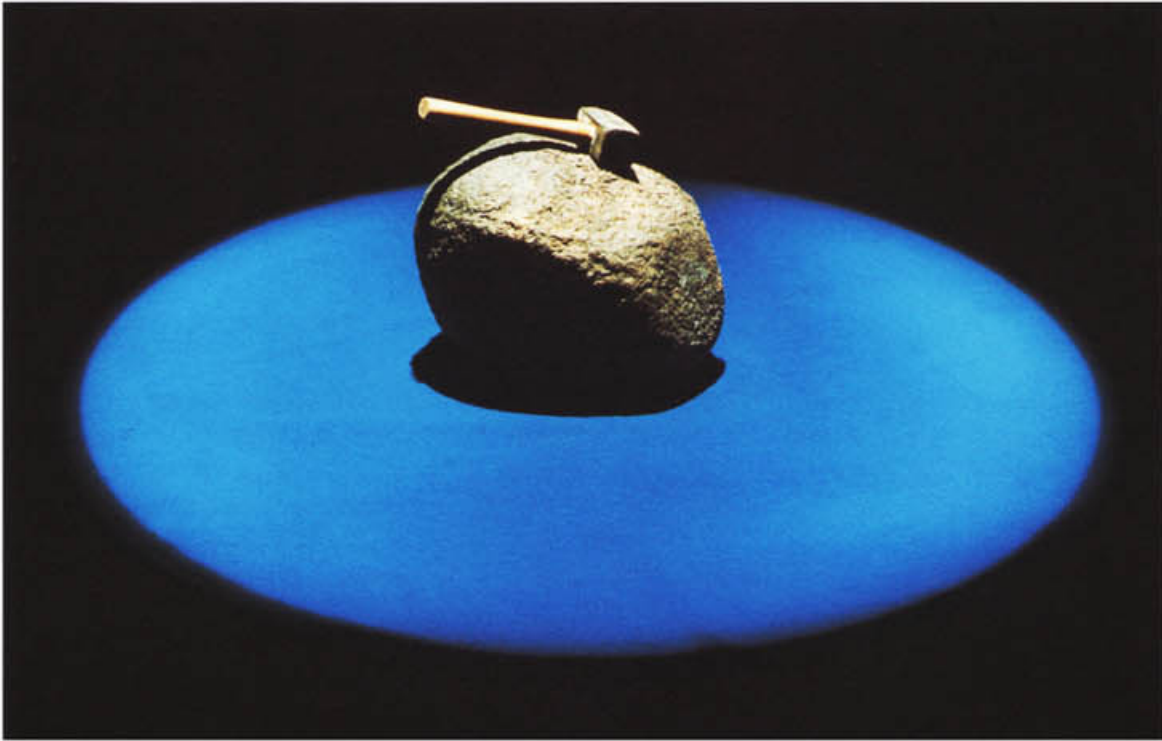
Recall Francis Picabia giving his lover a spark plug with the words FOR-EVER on it.



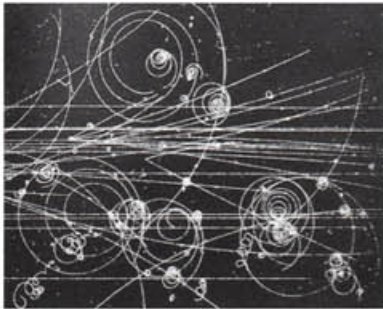
FACING PAGE:

Hammer on Rock, 1982
 Sound Installation: Coventry Gallery,
 Sydney
 hammer, rock, pigment, recording of
 waterfall and gong, 40 x 200 x 200 cm.

From the Centre (detail), 1983
 Installation: Arts Projects, Melbourne
 bronze stool and pearls.



5. The Technology of Appearances

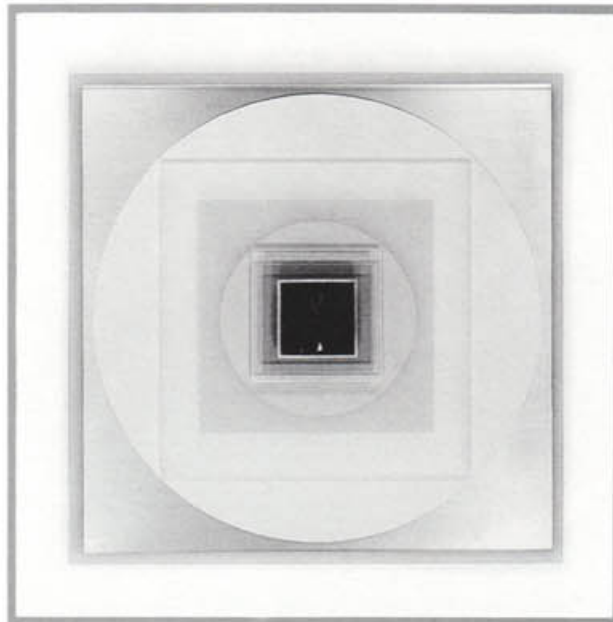


"Trajectories of subatomic particles in bubble chamber." CERN, Geneva.

Robert Owen studied sculpture with Lyndon Dadswell and drawing with John Olsen. Australia in the 50s was an oddly pre-psychological place, grounded in family, intolerant, isolated, conservative. He felt like a right-brain person trapped in a left-brain world. In 1963 he travelled to Greece – a blue and white land of myths and metamorphoses. In Greece he felt like a dragonfly whose head is all eyes. He came for three weeks and stayed three years.

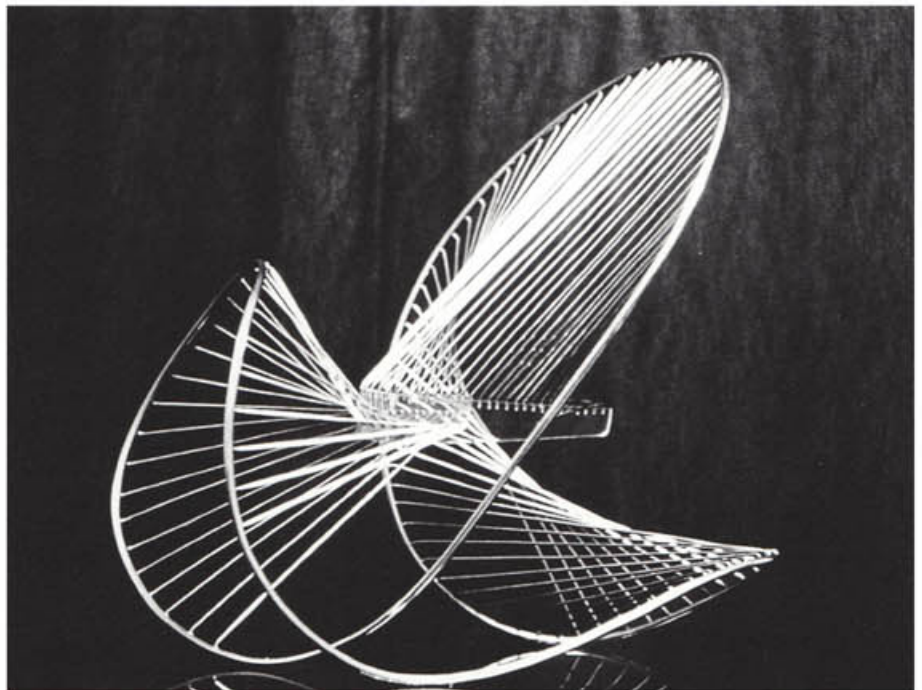
On Hydra, in the newly expanded world of the 60s, he lived among an expatriot colony of writers, translators, musicians. George Johnston, Jack Hershmann (translator of Artaud), Leonard Cohen. It was a pre-hippy world of travellers and beatniks, those Dharma Bums who combined a mood of high seriousness with demotic protopolitical responses. It was a time when Junta goons were clubbing anyone and snatching passports.

It was here that Owen studied not only Cycladic sculpture and Byzantine icons, but perception and light (luminosity, colour, form, transparency). With hints



Bird Sound, 1968
oroglass, perspex and aluminium,
46.5 x 46.5 cm
Private Collection.

Untitled, 1957-58
 perspex, brass, nickel wire, wood and
 formica, 35.5 x 45.6 x 25 cm



from thinkers from Huxley to Reich, artists like Stan Brackhage, Rothko, Brion Gyson, perception was pursued back through the optic nerve, back to the centres in the brain. The discussions were not of a sense, but of a *cluster of senses*. Like the hearing one does with one's skin. Like the other seeing that gets done by the blind. Think of the vast cluster of senses we call *touch*: it includes hot/cold, wet/dry, slippery/rough. Perception was a psychophysical phenomenon, a continent and not just a pipe that things run through. Here is Hollis Frampton talking about a red apple:

... the paramount thing about the apple may be that it is not red. It vibrates with significance that somehow terminates in the redness of the apple. But it's not the same red any more. When you see the red spiralling down through the deoxyribonucleic acid of the rose family to the tree suckers and blossoms... along with the fact that then red is what the apple rejects, the blue and the green are what it swallows.

In terms of light, Frampton is talking about what the apple has no use for, as though that were the apple. This is the radical Western version of Eastern aesthetics: the mind is biochemical, matter is energy, time may be a fabric or a fall.

In 1966 Owen travelled to London. Here mythic consciousness of Australia and Greece, joins the theoretic and scientific consciousness. Owen works with the grid as a way of dealing with this apprehension. And new materials become available: luminescent paints, perspex, aluminium, plastic, polished metals, neon,



FACING PAGE:

Hearing, 1986

Installation: 6th Biennale of Sydney,

"Origin, Originality & Beyond"

mixed metals, plastic, glass, rubber, pigment
and gold leaf, 250 x 430 x 530 cm.

small bulbs, prisms and lenses. Through a study of optics, Owen is drawn to diffraction grating, which splits up light by fine ruled grating, rather than by a prism. He is drawn to the striving form of scintillations, virtual movement, the use of skimming light reflected off surfaces, pulsations, changed levels of luminosity. The over-style for this kind of interest was Kinetic Constructivism. Owen had studied Gabo and Moholy-Nagy (who created dynamic distortions by the use of interference structures like grilles and diagonals), now Le Parc, Soto and *Ground Zero* were making telesculptures and luminodynamic works.

While absorbing the London Zeitgeist, Owen's central principle remains *claritas*: a term sustained by the analogy the light on the object bears to the light in the mind. Light is the reach of the intelligible out into the sensible. So Owen's aim is not to dazzle, but to achieve, through the play of objects, shadows and light, an *epiphany*.

Robert Lax, a friend of Ad Reinhardt and Thomas Merton, is a poet who lives on a Greek island (Kalymnos). He wrote a poem that defines epiphany as *claritas + thisness*:

This
bread
is bread

This
wine
is wine.

This
bread
is bread.

This
wine
is wine.

These
hands
are hands.

These
hands
are hands.

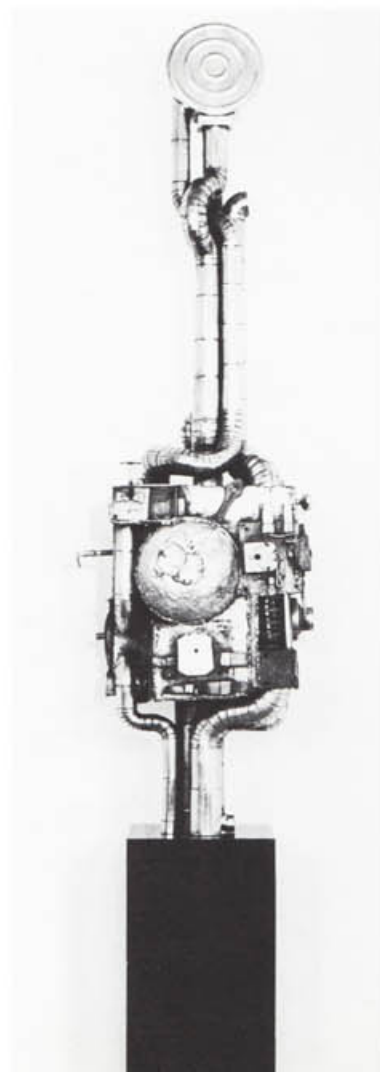
This
bread
is bread.

This
wine
is wine.

RIGHT:

Out Of My Head, 1964-65

chrome plated mixed metals, wood and
formica, 50 x 50 x 230 cm.





6. Paradiso



FACING PAGE:

Hiatus, 1981

Installation: Ivan Dougherty Gallery,
Sydney

Wall: photograph on linen on wood,
176 x 49 x 3 cm

Floor: talcum powder 'light', lead 'shadow'
and granite rock, 30 x 70 x 185 cm.

For some Heaven is Bermuda, for others Byzantium; for some a Mercedes, for others music. We think of it as the Pearly Gates, as Pie in the Sky. People with apple-breath, and breasts like clusters of palm trees, reading the Song of Solomon. Heaven is Transcendental Bliss, the body glorious, the garden enclosed. Heaven conjures 15th century tapestries of pleasure gardens with heraldic tickets on each shrub; *Le Dame a la Licorne*: marble naiads; elliptical mandorlas like flying saucers, or the miniature paradises of hashish-eaters.

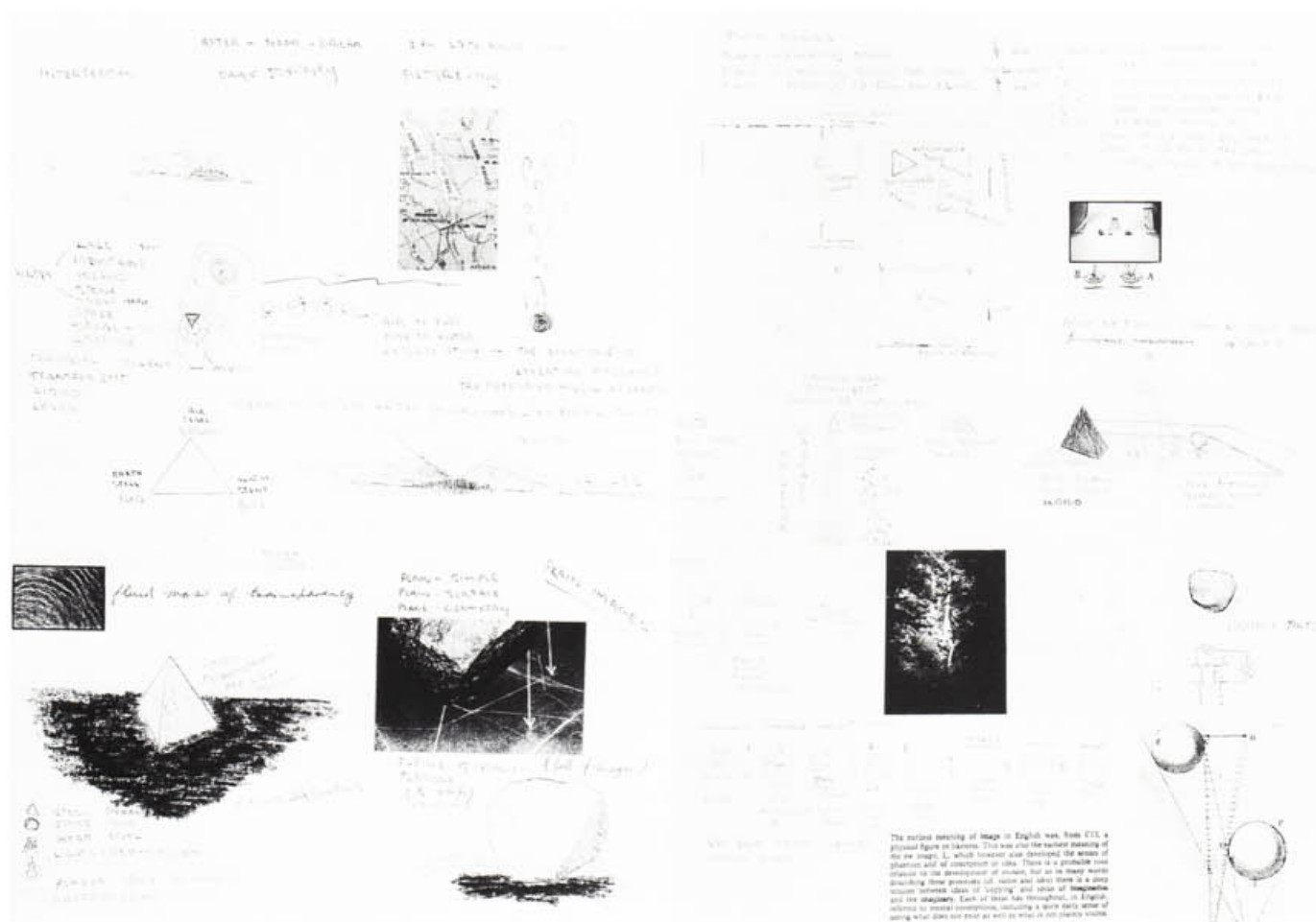
But of course Heaven is not a place, but a state. Paradise is "spezzato", wrote Ezra Pound, in fragments it arrives, a flickering here-and-gone environment in which the universe lives like music. Light, dancing on the stones, from which grew trees whose gnarled roots were dark against the dazzle of the whitewashed walls. The transient aspects of permanence, the permanent aspects of transience. Paradise lives its life in flashes and glimmers in the wind.

Robert Owen developed a vocabulary of paradise from books, from images, from sea voyages to the coastal regions of the Eastern Mediterranean, in Asia Minor – Byzantium in the 6th and 12th centuries – with its mosaics, mosques and minarets. Also through Asia: stupas and palaces and reliquaries, and gold-embroidered sanctuaries. More than merely Romantic, Owen's sensibility absorbs the luminous details and constellates them. This gives art a valid civic function: to provide intimations of a permanent clarity in the mind, i.e., a kind of mini-ecosystem, the conditions suggesting the best possible for a culture.

In this age of IBM and Sleeping Cells, Baudrillard declares a glaciation of the senses. The senses are fossils he says in *Cool Memories* (1987). Owen's work admonishes the present, but enriches it because alertly seen and felt, and passed on, to us. If anything Owen glaciates in order to *celestialise the senses*.

In *Hiatus* (1981) a moment is frozen as light passes through a window, bathing a stone in its clarity. The window is a photograph, the light is powder. The light is palpable, solid, Vermeer-esque – a parallelogram like a frost of talc. The radiant epiphany preserves the hazeless clarity of some First Morning? Last Afternoon?

The journey to Paradise they say is always a return. A letting go, an unlearning, a travelling homeward to birth. Paradise is a vision of freedom because it involves a dissolution of the self. Mexican writer Octavio Paz develops a vocabulary of paradise. Space is not an expanse but a magnet attracting



From *Notes to Myself: Plain Images*,
1981
pencil and mixed media on paper,
37 x 27 cm.

FACING PAGE:

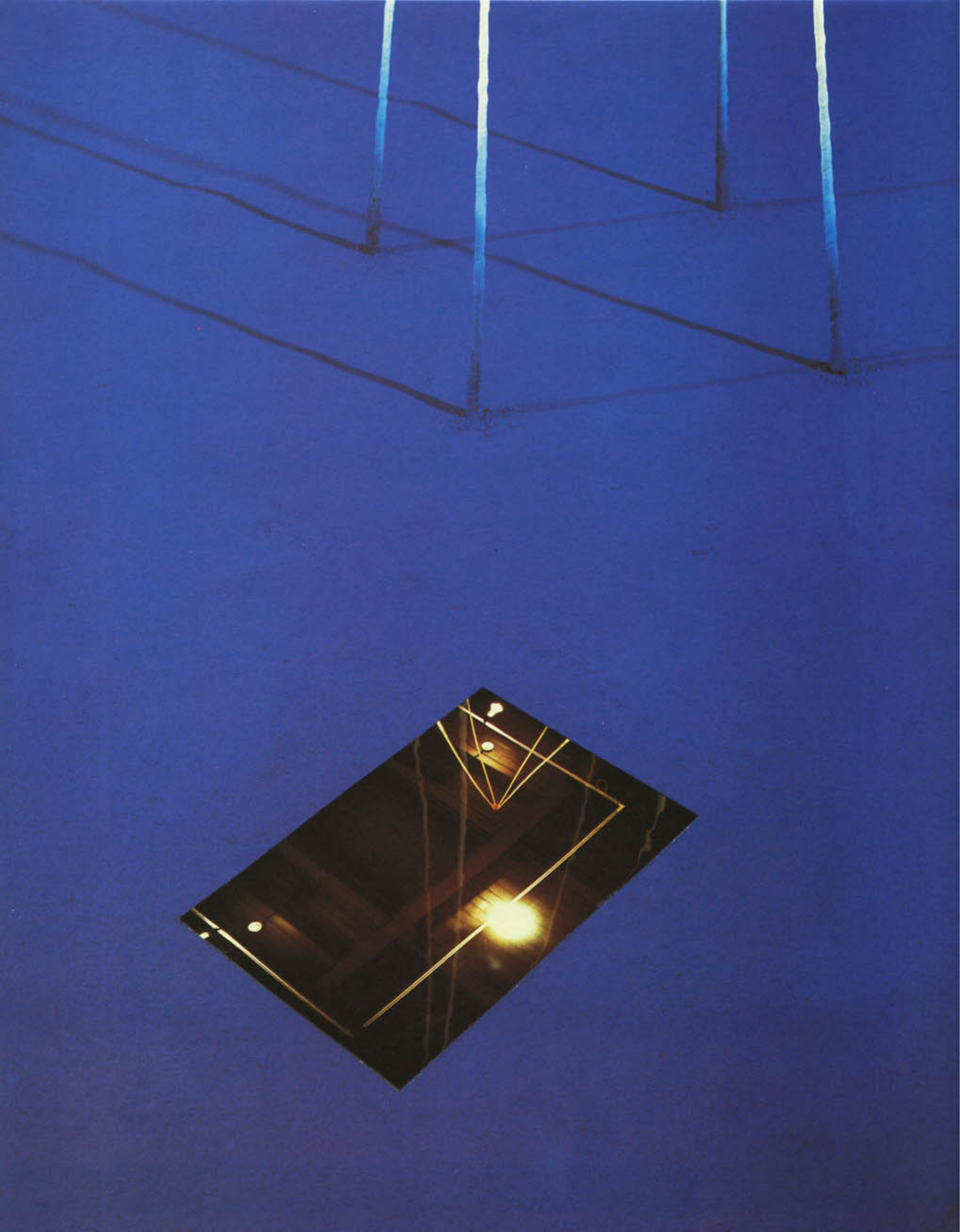
Plain Images (detail), 1981
pigment, wood, cottonwool and photograph.

appearances. Stones, light and water take on a special quality. Light has no visible source, yet it traces outlines, delimits space. Light separates while water unites. Water is diffuse, elusive, formless. Light is essence, the realm of the intemporal. Water evokes time, tides, death and resurrection. Everything is reflected in it, everything flounders in it, is reborn in it. Light makes water a precious stone. It turns time into a mineral, makes it eternal. Mesmerised by the celestial flash of lightning it becomes motionless.

Left to themselves stones are opaque, inert, brute existence. Owen will make a stone luminous and translucent, its moral nature changes.

In Ancient China never was a house built without a geomancer's advice. Geomancy being the art by which the favourable influence of mountain-shape and the weight and colour of neighbouring water, is determined. Geomantic perception – the power of surroundings over the equilibrium of the psyche – extends to the placement of colours and objects and lines of the artist's vision.

In 1981 Owen exhibited the installation *Plain Images* (with Mike Parr) in



Lake Tekapo, South Island. New Zealand, 1981.



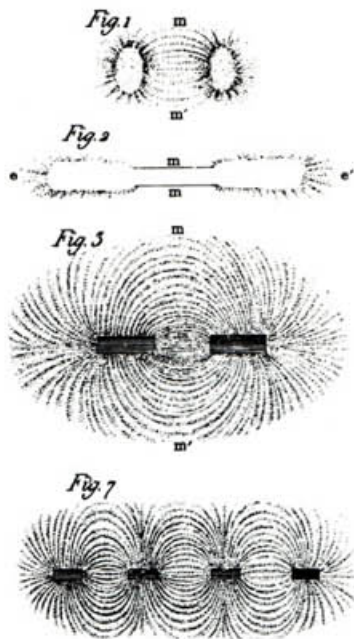
Plain Images, 1981 (detail)
Sound Installation (with Mike Parr): Ivan
Dougherty Gallery, Sydney
mixed media, 270 x 457 x 457 cm.

Sydney. The central image is of Lake Tekapo in New Zealand. On the floor a wild blue ultramarine pigment 460 x 460 cm, a granite rock, the sound of a waterfall on an endless loop, a steel pyramid, an acutely elongated stool in the middle of the powder pigment lake, looking for all the world as though it is half-way into orbit.

Standing on the edge of a lake on a jump or think basis? We throw a stone instead, and the ripples lead us into a meditation on the tensional-compressional ultimates of the solar system. Everything flows or shuttles the way our lungs do. Colours have speeds, and all colours take to the water in blue. Why do painters paint their best blue when the mind is serene? Gazing at intense blue abstracts the glare of light and floats the mind. Blue is an energy event vibrating 600,000,000,000 times per second. Halfway between black and white, blue is the fulcrum of light, but the hinge of darkness.

Owen's work requires that it maintain some wholeness, but this is a more 'holistic' than an idealistic perspective. A picture of the world without inequality; harmony. The work is also a kind of re-wiring of the world compelling out of the material selected some electric pattern. Just as, cut off by a layer of glass, iron filings leap around the poles of a magnet, making, some believe, a kind of dark rose.

7. The Book of Changes



Terrestrial paradises are hard won, and they are won in snatches, fear stays with us most of our lives. The shifting of passion takes place by the action of light *and* darkness. A wall of light separates us from each other.

After 12 years away Owen returned to Australia, aged 39. He then showed a key work, *Memory and Logic Units/Phase Zone 1-2, 1976-1977*. This work, in keeping with our metaphors, might be called purgatorial. But it announces a period of fecundity, where he starts to evolve a language of his own. This is a time of change and return, and it provokes memory-emancipated imagery. From the timeless into time. Indeed a plurality of times: time wasted, time lost, time restored, and through the medium of the works of this period, time regained. Each line of time mingles several kinds of involuntary signs. The language is hieroglyphic i.e. produced for decipherment, not just visual communication. Owen writes the mantra: "I change, I am the same" so that it starts to resemble a graphite waterfall.

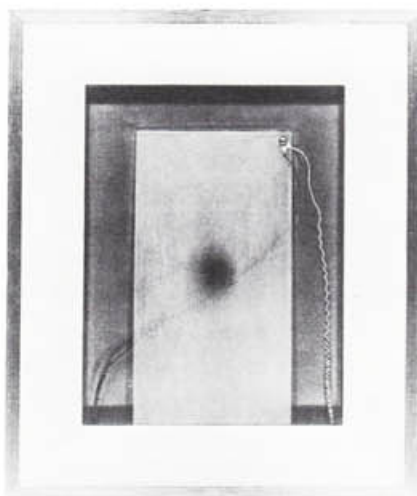
In *Phase Zone 1-2*, nine mounted frames contain a bromide paper turned inside out. Against black paper, aluminium foil, plastic, each frame arrays its objects – lead, mirror, silver leaf, 2-way switches, fuse wire, carbon, condensers etc. – in the correct layout in order to neutralise one power, and activate another.

A string is used like the thread that guides us through the labyrinth. It maps his body from forehead to genitals (according to Standard British Measurement Charts) in an updating of Henry Agrippa's superimposition of the body over the universe and recalling Leonardo's Vitruvium Man for whom navel and genitals are the centres of a square and circle.

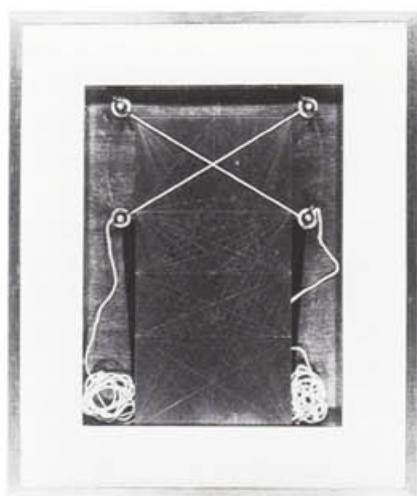
A woman's earring clips function as sensors to understand the order of her circuits. Currents are reversible. A two-way switch – a flow in two channels – becomes a metaphor for Yin Yang. A telephone cable, medium for communicating at a distance, is unpacked and laws out as red, blue, black, white. A stone from Greece marks a change of state, by translation across a body of water; a stone taken from among the olive groves which were once full of voices. Graphite, held to the mountboard by magnets, is explicated in his notebooks as the crystalline form of carbon, chemically identical with diamond. In this world of number and relation, carbon becomes diamond by a progressive doubling up of the vectors of its crystal edges. And what sets this happening is what physicists call 'mass attraction'. *Eros, c'est la vie.*



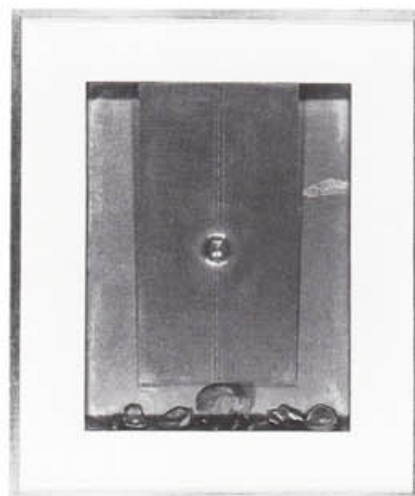
Memory and Logic Units/Phase Zone 1-2,
1976
mixed media, 43.7 x 437 cm overall.
Collection Australian National Gallery,
Canberra.



Memory and Logic Units/Phase Zone 1-2
(detail), 1976.
Unit 2: *Two-way Switch*
lead, perspex, wire and graphite,
47.3 x 39.5 cm.

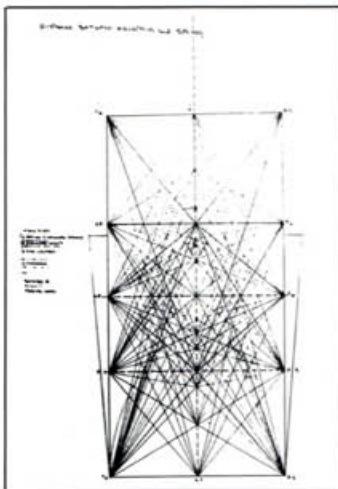
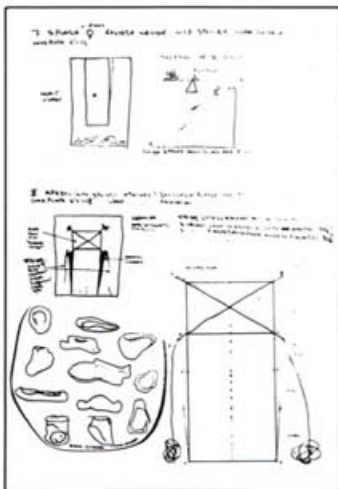
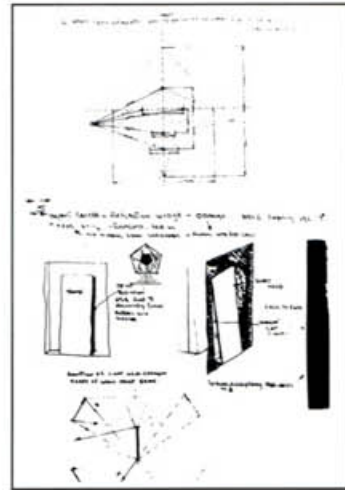
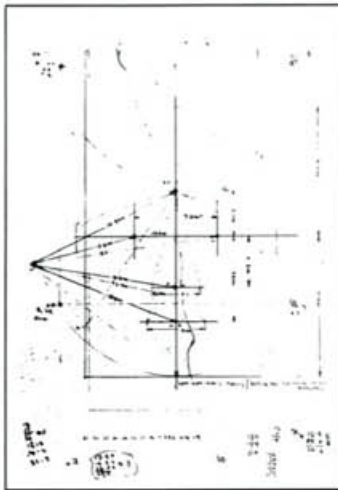
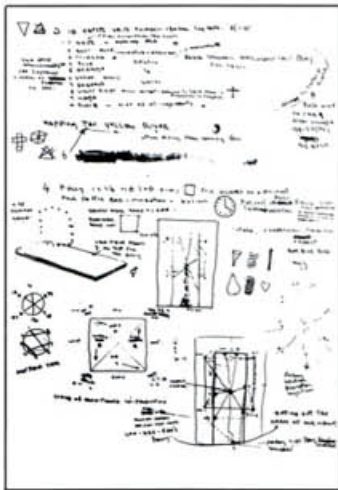
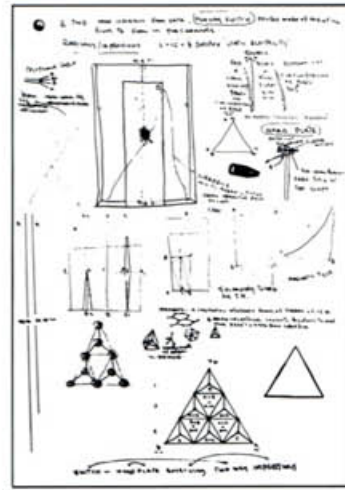
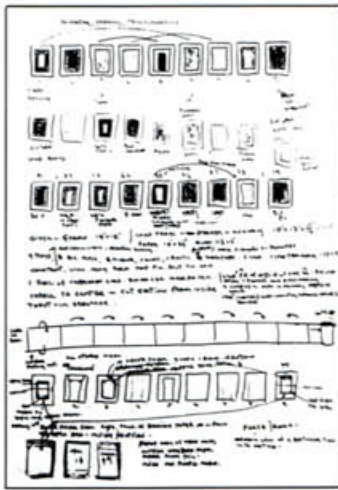
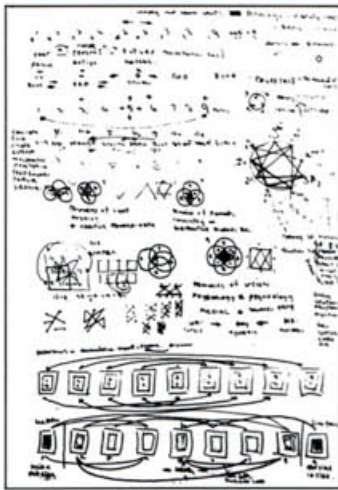


Unit 7: *Splash*
lead, stones, feather and letreset.



Unit 8: *Apron with Strings*
Attached/Secondary Sleeve for T.M.
lead, steel, string, graphite
and silver leaf.

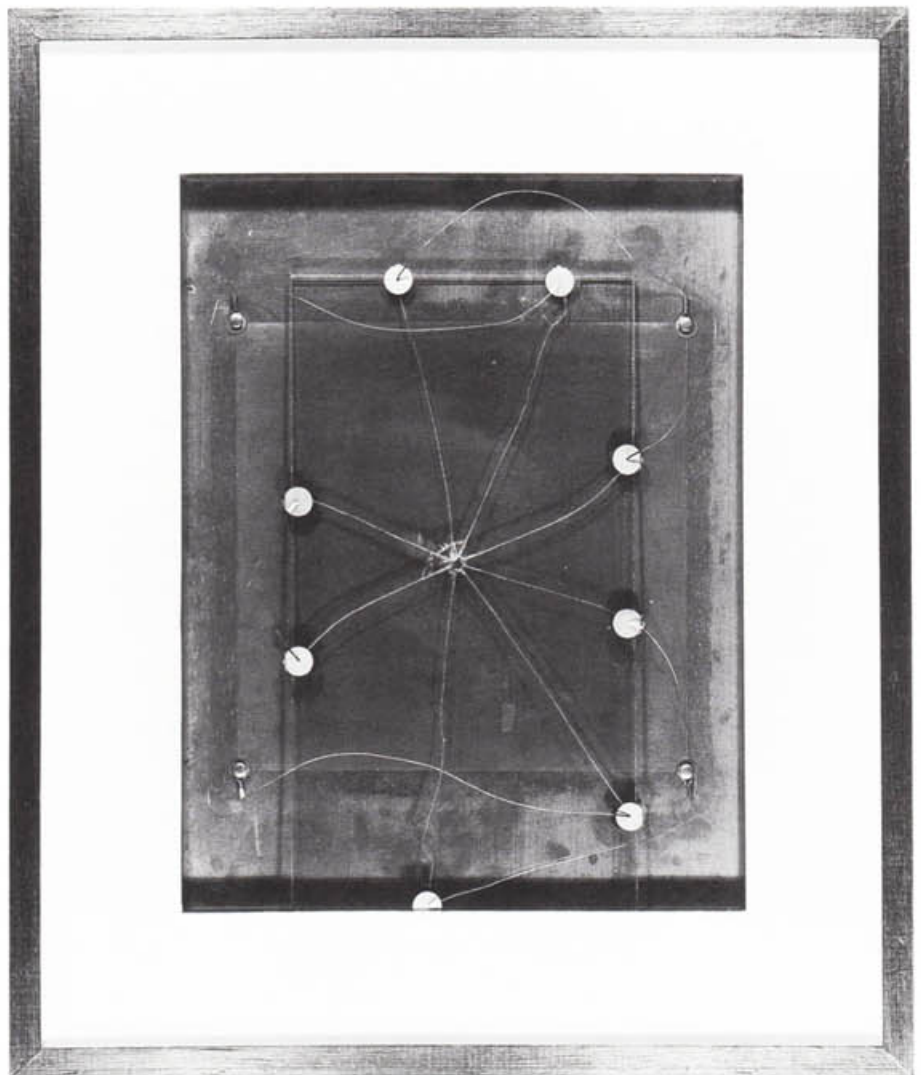
FACING PAGE:
From Notes To Myself/Phase Zone 1-2,
1975-76
ink, pencil and photographs on paper, 42 x
29.8 cm each.
Collection Australian National Gallery,
Canberra.



Memory and Logic Units/Phase Zone 1-2
(detail), 1976-77.

Unit 4: *Loo-kse-edo's Folly-Setting Out
the Order of Her Circuits*

lead, glass, perspex, wire, brass and letraset
47.3 x 39.5 cm.



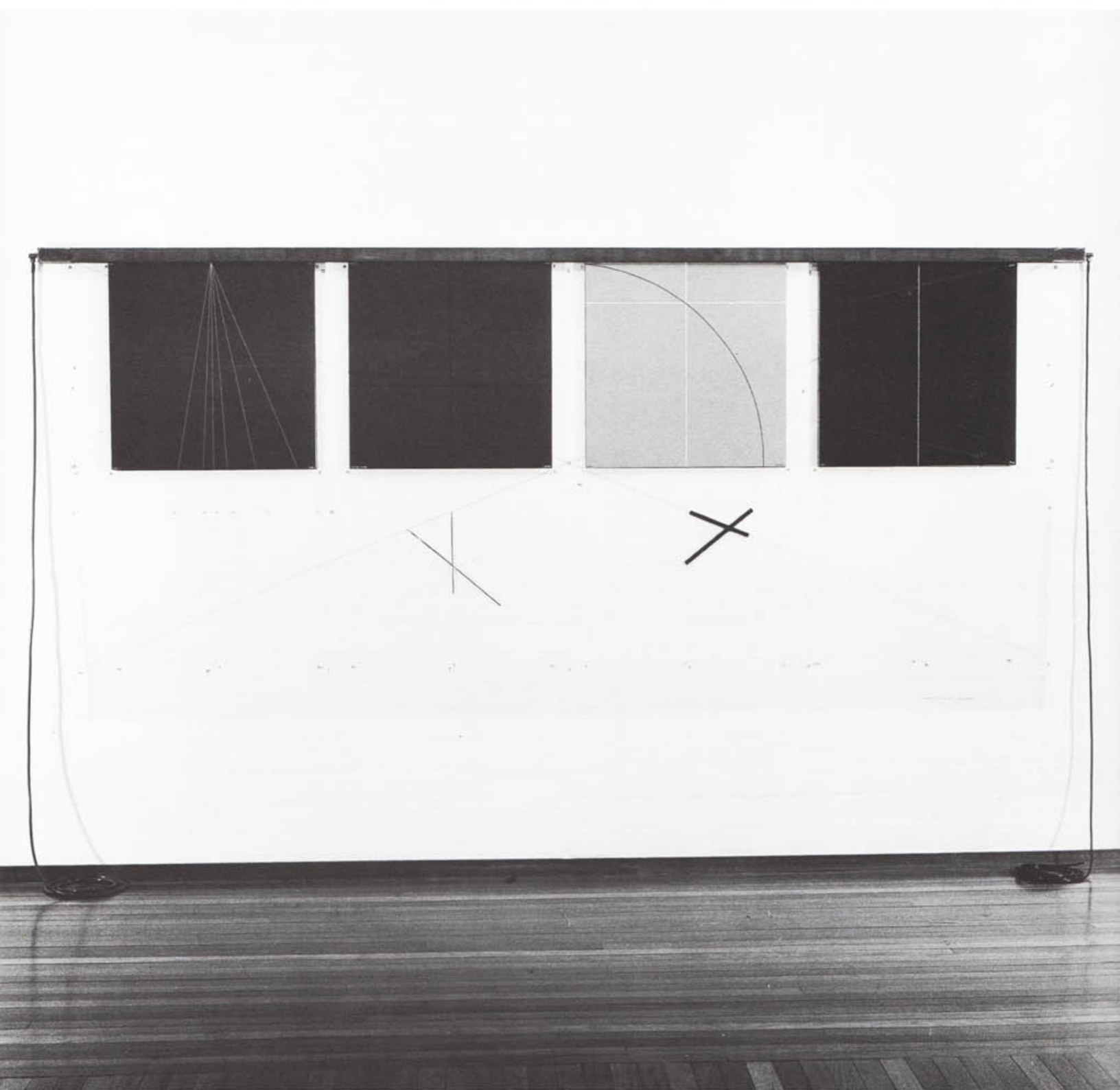
I imagine this work as a cadenza in which the emotional current of one man's experience is sent through this circuit of nine phases, and then run backwards. Like the bromide photographic bag (holding the secret of images), time is turned inside out. Joy and suffering are reabsorbed, personal loss reconstituted, the direction of energy relations reversed, spirits leap back into bodies, bodies into geometries, geometries into terminals, terminals into framed objects on their way to a public gallery, back then to life – to be unravelled into air and light, into words and conversations, into books like this one, into further art marking. A nice eco-system: what you get is more than what you paid for.

FACING PAGE:

Cross Reference No. 5, 1977

synthetic polymer, paint, aluminium and
mixed media on board, 181 x 334 x 24 cm

Collection of the Australian National
Gallery, Canberra.





8. Biotech Rehearsals for Leaving the Body

Robert Owen made *Altar* for the European Dialogue Biennale of Sydney in 1979. A table made of lead, with one leg grown out of a large granite rock, sits on 24 steel plates. A table for ceremony, for communion; a place of refuge; an enigmatic construction like some Druidic place where people gather at midsummer dawn as the sun enters a new sign of the zodiac.

On the table two silver goblets, one polished, one tarnished. One leaks like a tear. A chrome tuning fork, 36 alphabetical letters scattered like leaves, out of which the word BREATH is formed. Strength? Inspiration? Conspiracy? The granite's ancestry recalls the philosopher's stone, the harmony of opposites, but comes out of the cold envelope of the earth, with its memory of violent cataclysm, and clings to the knees of the table, or supports it. The tuning fork provides pitch, the right degree of tuning on the tonal scale of Being. A tonic is both musical and medicinal. Perhaps we could discover a resonance at which we could cycle comfortably forever, each pulse from the output presented at the input exactly in time to catch the world off balance? Pythagorean equations fill Owen's notebooks: $3^2 + 4^2 = 5^2$, giving pentachords and tetrachords.

RIGHT:

Altar, 1978-79

Wall: acrylic and pencil on paper on wood,
122 x 122 x 5 cm

Floor: 24 steel plates, granite, lead, glass,
water, tuning fork, electronic device,
letraset, resin and acrylic,

92 x 305 x 203 cm

Collection of the City Art Gallery,
Wagga Wagga.

FACING PAGE:

From the Centre, 1983

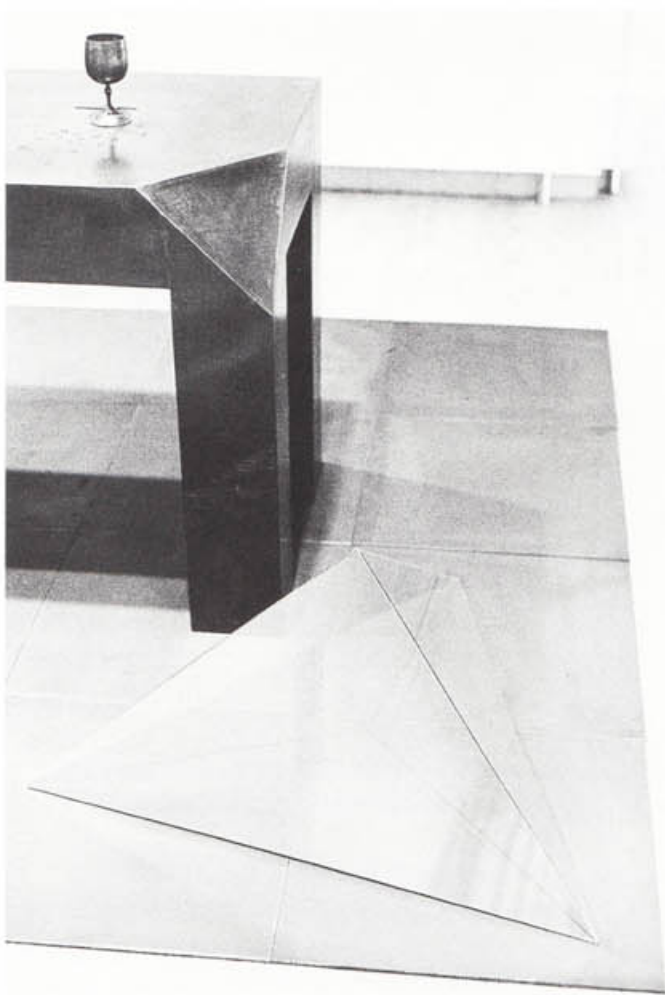
Installation: Roslyn Oxley9 Gallery, Sydney

Wall: acrylic and mironite on canvas,
320 x 183 cm

Floor: bronze stool, 11 pieces of coal, 64
limestone rocks and 196 imitation pearls,
56 x 245 x 400 cm.







Altar (detail), 1978-79

Left hand detail: goblet, letters, tuning fork and glass object on lead table and steel plates. Right hand detail: goblet, shadow, water, granite rock on lead table and steel plates.

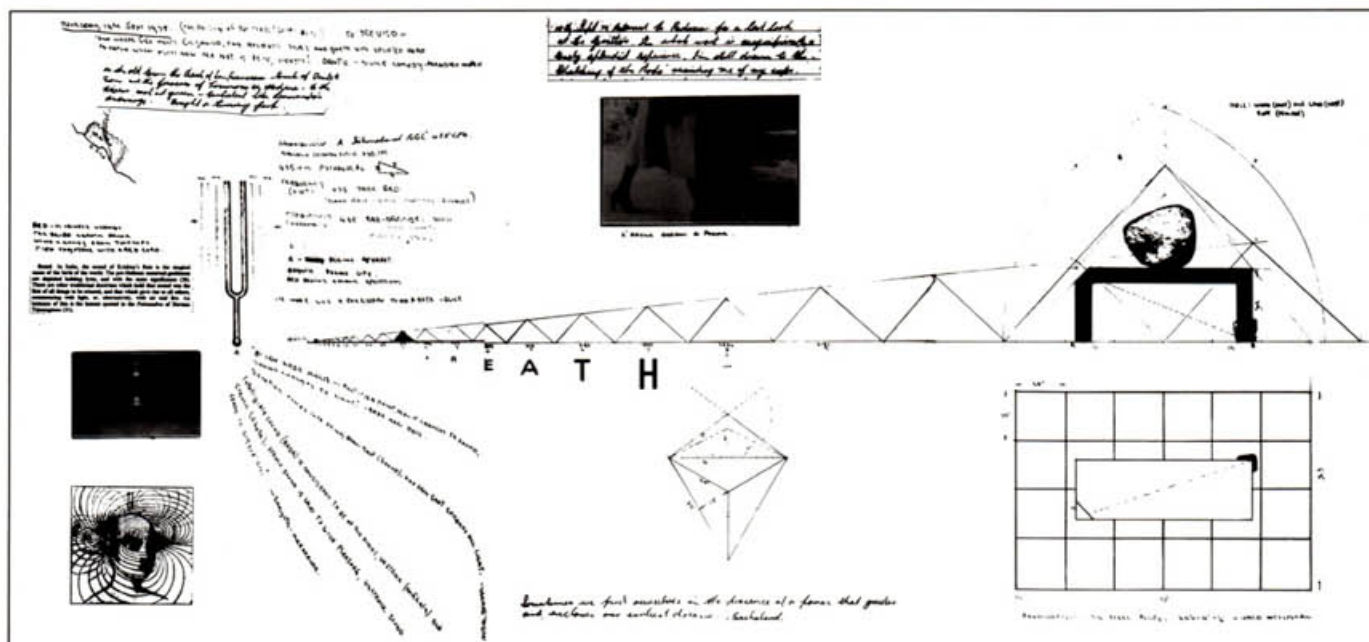
FACING PAGE:

The Four Seasons (From the Centre), 1988
Installation view, City Art Gallery, Wagga Wagga, N.S.W.
4 cibachrome photographs, 36 blue electric lights and sound tape, 6 x 12 metres overall.

If life were like music, we could play it over and over again till we got it right.

They say our bodies are woven and unwoven of new stuff every seven years. We're just a metabolic knot of tons of solids, liquids and gases to pass through. The East suggests practices for becoming a mandala, a psychocosmogram, pivoting upon the chakras. Imagine a point of light the size of a sesame seed. Imagine two very fine white points within the pupils of the eye. Imagine a fine blue point inside each ear. The mandala provides a focus for both centering and vaporization, coupling and solitude, here-and-now and elsewhere. This kind of visualization or figurative meditation is an act of holding a definite image in the mind and through sensuous attention entering into the energy stored in the image.

A circle is easy to visualise, so is a square. It is hard to visualise the circle contained inside the square. Impose a triangle on the combination and try and see the figure as a whole. Imagine two diagonal lines crossing the figure. Watch it



Notes To Myself - Altar, 1978-79
ink, pencil and photographs on paper
42 x 89.5 cm.

decompose into a kind of vagueness and in a sense half-seen: a cloud of bright points from which appear and disappear in sudden flashes: a square, a circle, a triangle.

In *Prometheus Blue* 1983, bodies of friends become silhouettes like 'flameprints' (an early word for photographs), against deep blue backgrounds. They constellate around the trademark stool. Everything hovers around the granite rock with gold leaf on a platform of lead. A Greek Orthodox candle burns steadily, gathering the gloom about it. Owen's themes keep returning, renewing themselves.

Here East meets West in compassion, impermanence, not-self.

The stone lies in a river, a piece of wood jammed against it. Dead leaves, drifting logs and branches caked with mud collect around; weeds settle and soon birds have made a nest and are feeding their young among blossoming water plants. Then the river rises and the earth is washed away. The birds migrate, the flowers wither. The branches are dislodged and drift downward. No trace is left of the floating island but a stone submerged by the water, such is the self.

FACING PAGE:

Prometheus Blue, 1982-83

Installation: "Presence and Absence"

Art Gallery of Western Australia, Perth

Wall: acrylic and mironite on canvas,

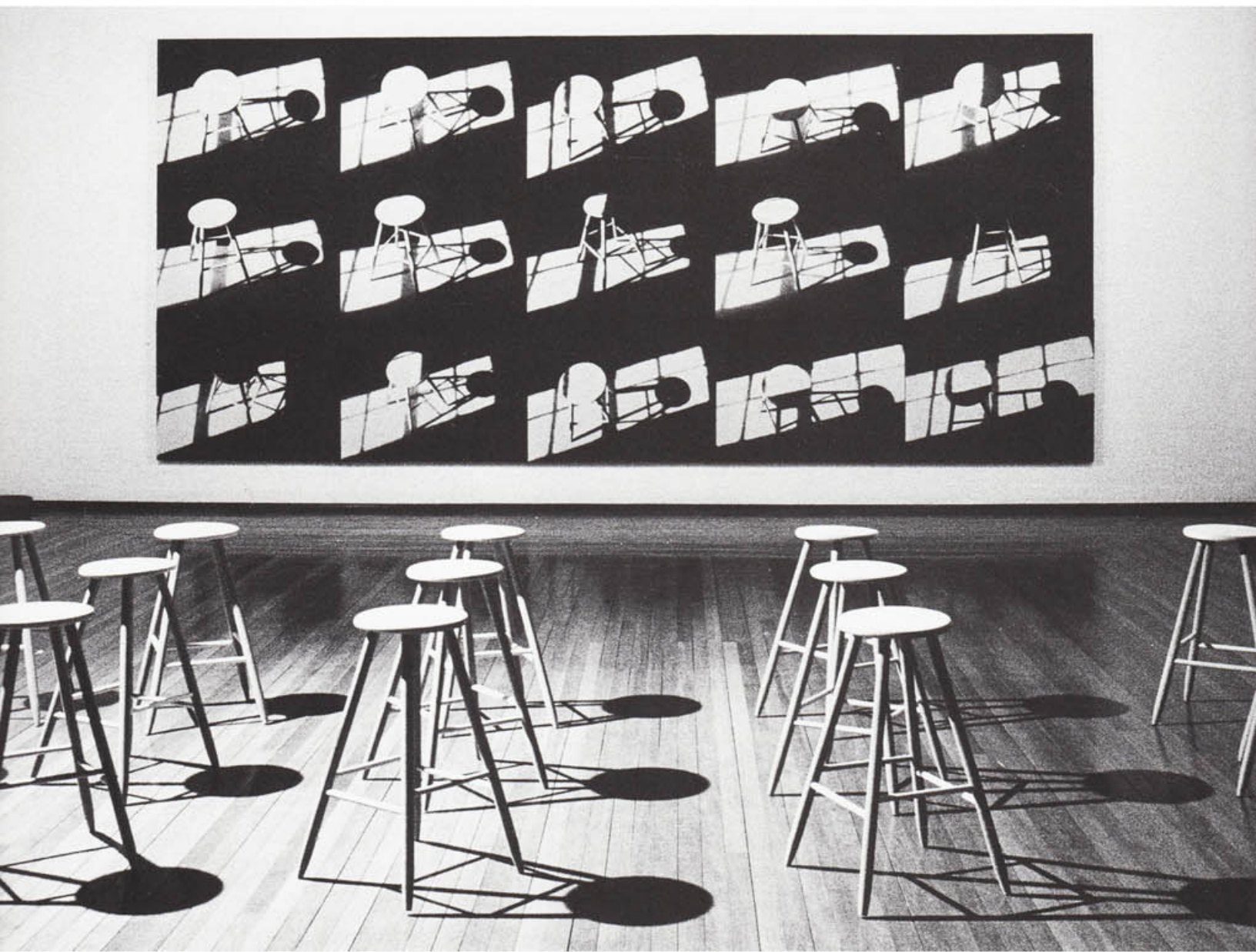
350 x 1260 cm

Floor: lead, wood, granite, gold leaf, clay oil

lamp, bronze stool and 64 pigmented

stones, 1080 x 1080 cm.





9. Stories, Stones, Stars

Stories last longer than men, stories than stones, stars than stones.

Now the instrument of the research is the telescope. Infinite distances subtend infinitesimal attractions. In 1980, Owen made *Apposition*: 15 wooden stools, 15 photos of the stool, 15 paintings from the photographs. Kosuth's *Three Chairs* comes to mind. Art as a statement about art: visual-verbal-real chair-signs cycling endlessly inside the tight master code of Art. *Apposition* spirals beyond mere tautology, with the effect of planetarising the stool. Inner and outer space is being investigated here, as the increasing angle of the sun with its snare of shadows makes us feel the earth turn slowly, like the hour hand of a clock. It seems like it is the stool that covers and uncovers the sun in a fantastic clockwork – not the earth – sighting and eclipsing it, as the arcs, tangents and trajectories of painted shadows describe the immutable relativities of diurnal rotation.

FACING PAGE:

Aposition, 1979-80

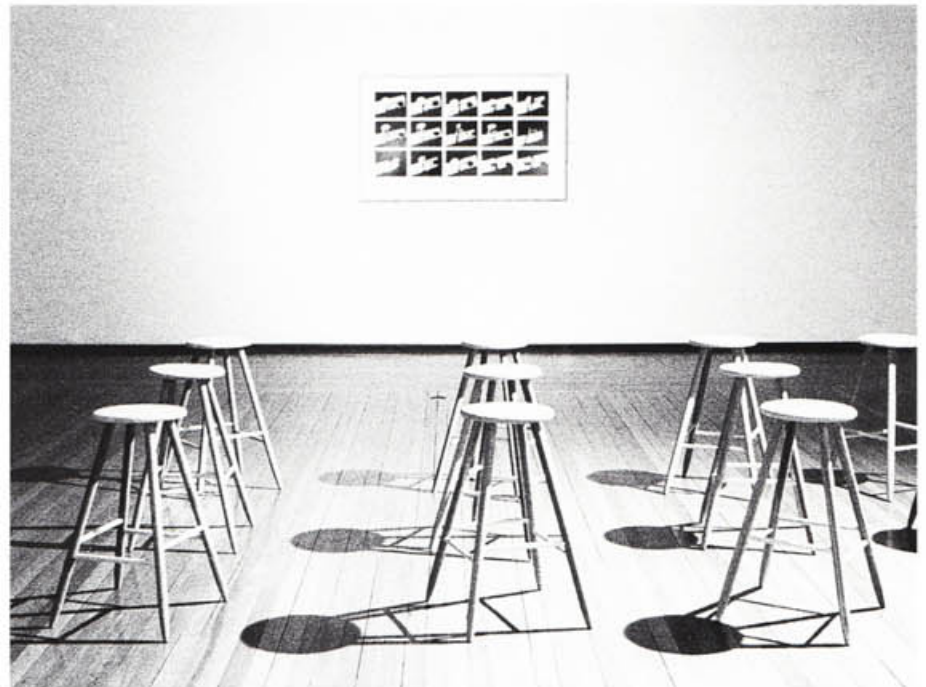
Installation: Coventry Gallery, Sydney

East Wall: 15 black and white photographs and text, 92 x 155 cm

Floor: 15 wooden stools, 61 x 200 x 400 cm

West Wall: 15 images, acrylic on canvas, 5 panels, 305 x 685 cm

Collection of The Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney.



RIGHT:

Apposition (detail), 1979-80

photographs, text and stools.



Perseus and Andromeda
wall painting, Pompeii.

The reason a satellite can stay in orbit is that it keeps two forces in balance – the outward plunge of the planets and the inner tug of solar gravity. The work puts the viewer into orbit on some Duchampian monocycle, vapourising the room.

Celestial bodies and their legends fill the mind with awe. Queen Cassiopeia and Andromeda, Perseus and Medusa are part of Owen's pantheon, as well as Prometheus. Now with new lens technology and mirror technology, astronomers watch stars too hot to burn. Brilliant, incandescent, high pressure gases, coronas, aurorae... shooting stars destroyed by friction as they speed through the atmosphere; nebulae are made luminous by the presence of these stars in gas clouds; meteors thick as snowflakes, but made of nickel and iron, 100 million meteors smaller than pinheads enter the atmosphere each day. Collisions inside nebulae ionise gases and cause them to glow with colours, producing rainbow bands from glorious orange-red of long-wave to violet or whitish-blue of short-wave radiating through space.

When stellar astronomy turns into astrophysics, astrophysics becomes a kind of lyric poetry. Van Gogh around Arles and Avvers, wrote: "First of all the twinkling stars vibrated, but remained motionless in space, then all the celestial globes were untied into one series of movements. At Avvers-sur-Oise, firmament and planets both disappeared, but the mighty breath which gives life to all things and which all is bound up, remained".

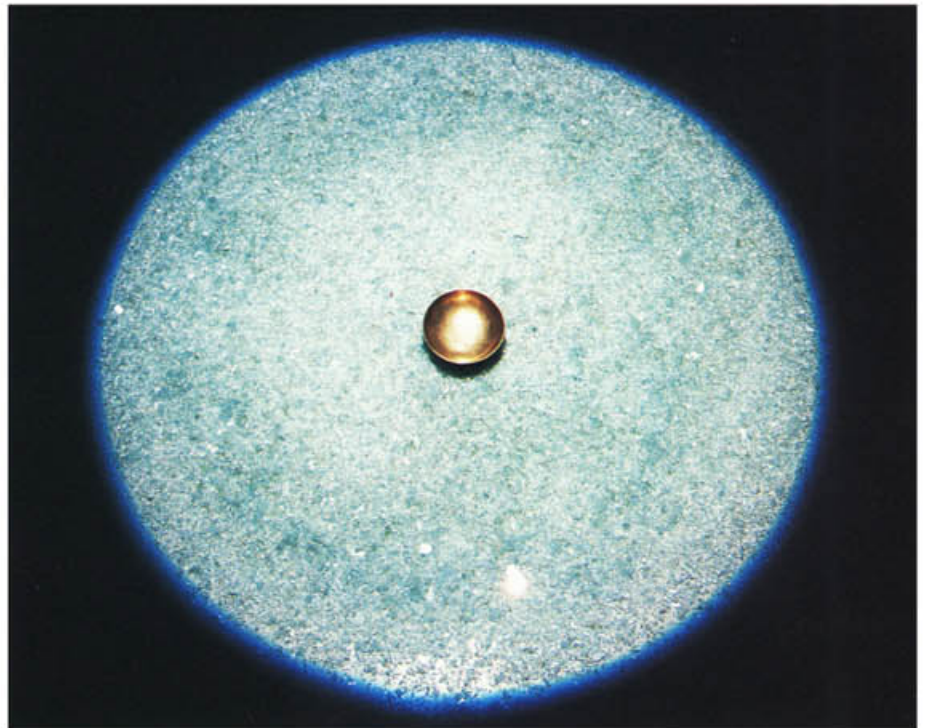
Sun, moon and the other bodies exert a pull on the earth's bulge so that its axis starts to wobble in the manner of a top which is about to fall.

RIGHT:

A Warring Peace; A Sweet Wound; A Mild Evil (detail), 1988

Installation detail: Institute of Modern Art, Brisbane.

glass, Tibetan bowl, light, jasmine essence, 2m diameter.

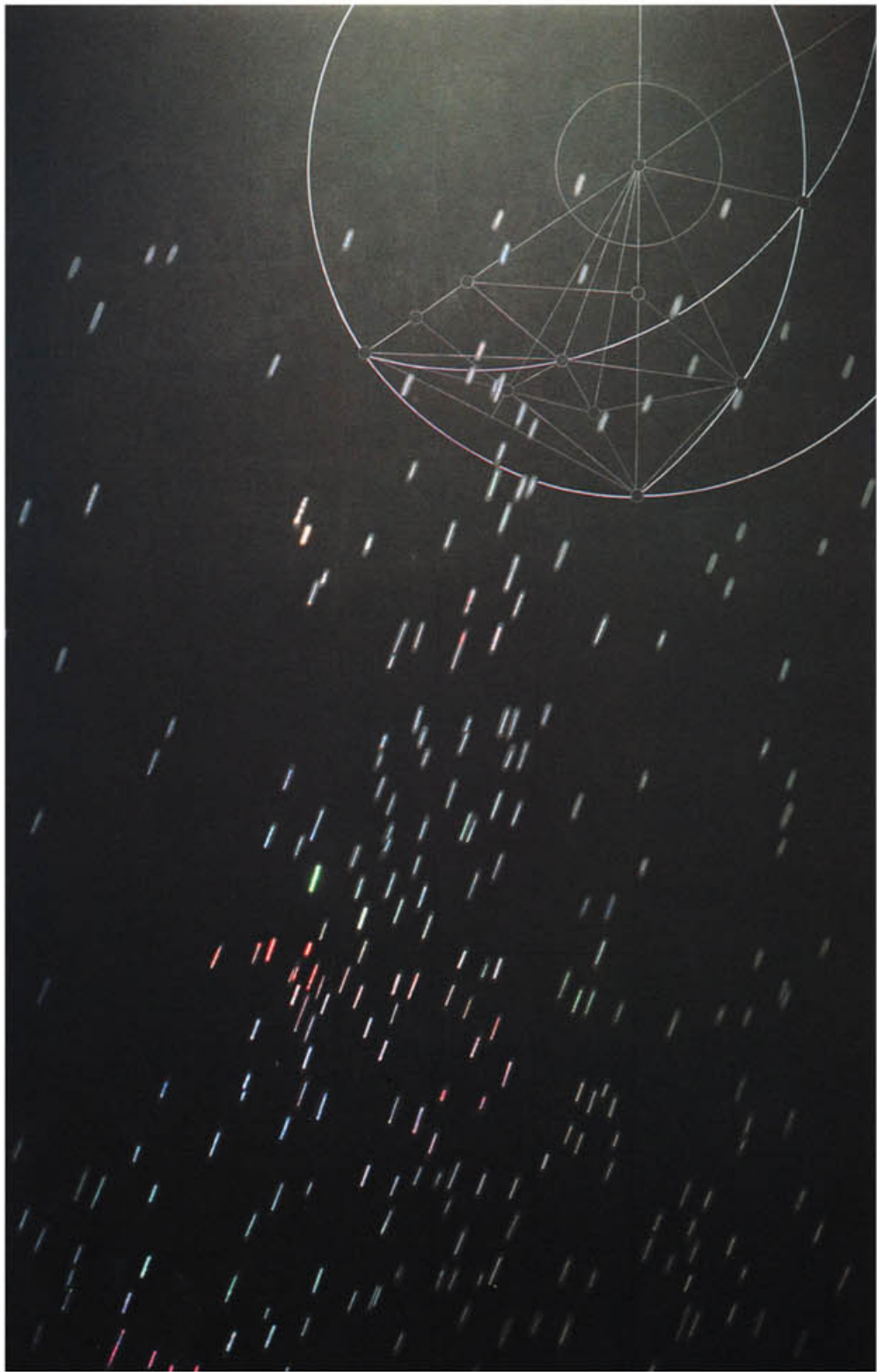


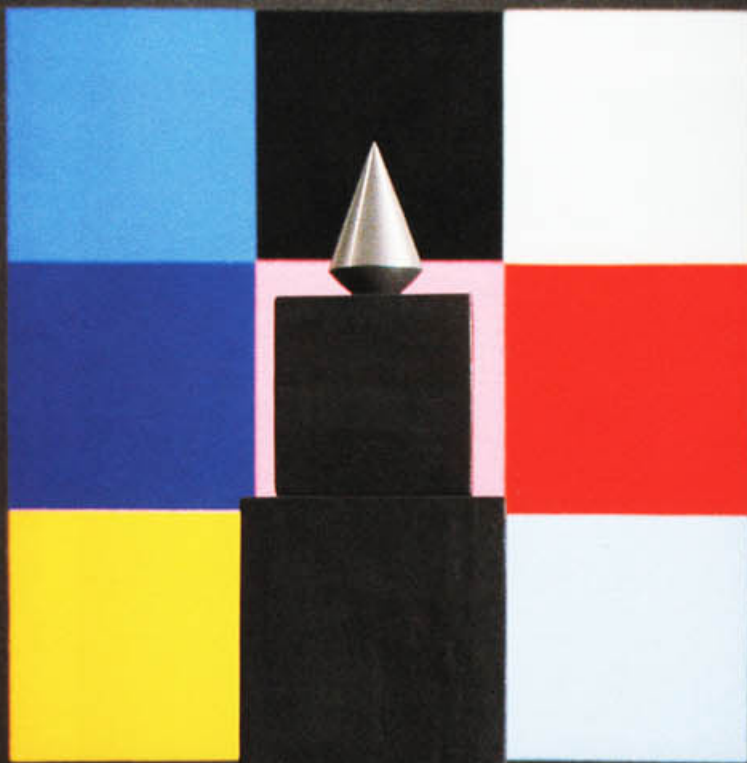
FACING PAGE:

Turn of the Moon, 1983-84

mixed media on canvas 259 x 167 cm

Private Collection.





FACING PAGE:

Because of This (for Piotre Olszanski),
1987 (detail)

Wall: oil, graphite and acrylic on canvas,
259 x 168 cm

Floor: wood, lead and chrome plated cast
iron, 172 x 28 x 28 cm.

Looking at the moon. You get an elementary picture *and* this great plastic dimension. Space as infinity in this non-terrestrial sensation. This can lead to transparency, the inner overlapping with the void: or *no-scale*. No-scale is the attribute of all material bodies in this context we call infinity and eternity.

But moving planets form a continuous set of repeated relationships, a set of geometric figures created by drawing straight lines between them. Owen's recent (*Phase Zone Three* 1988) shows this interest, harmonizing interplanetary rhythms makes the artist a plastic celestialist. He seeks in the inner life of relationships; how forces flow from one point to another; how centres of energy are born from their intersections. Maximum movement = maximum stillness in a space void of protesting forces. The chaste semi-abstract lines of the East, connote the labyrinth of contemplation required to absorb one into a world beyond this one. In *Because of This (For Piotr Olszanski)*, 1987, flattened diamonds of graphite exist in spiderweb tensions and create steady shimmers. The celestial suggests the raw chemical look of pigment, the full saturation of the rainbow palette. In *Turn of the Moon* (1984) the brownish graphite shadow of earth puts the nerves to sleep, only to surprise you as you walk past it, as light catches the diffraction grating, azuring over in light-dazzle. It is like colour shaking a tambourine.

It seems that in this series of 'astro-poetic' works that Owen is also resolving the carbon/diamond paradox that he has pursued through his working career. Might the earthy carboniferous body in mortality be crystallised into hard and faceted diamond? Light through matter makes it spin. Do we spin forever?

In *Apposition* suffering is the sun because its rays cover distances without blotting them out. Now the ever telescopic, astronomical laws that Owen subjects himself to makes the Star Triffid over the Western Desert a home for the body to be mapped. Rather than copy any aboriginal motifs, Owen sets his own perceptions in the same context. In *From the Centre* (1983) Owen places a handful of pearls on the stool – the irretrievable pearls of time, perhaps, of experience. The nacreous pearls replace and reflect the flameprint silhouette of the artist himself in the picture. But placed against nebulas pearls prolong their lives.





10. Transmissions

Some of Owen's recent work has seemed more terrestrial. Certainly the sculptures, bricolaged from junkyards – *Persephone's Towers* (1985), *Resurrections* (1985) and *What Are Poets For?* (1987), seem earthed, and yet they are also transmission devices, tools for re-wiring the chakras of the body. They are also Buddhist stupas as well as radar stations, and to some critics, 30s Moscow skyscrapers and 40s lampshades. Here scrap is metamorphosed into a starry sky, blue pigment is a radiant metaphor for its atmospherics too.

Persephone's Towers, 1985
Foreground: "Lakshmi"
mixed media and pigmented stones,
235 x 46 x 46 cm.



FACING PAGE:
What Are Poets For, 1987
Left: *Vertical Gold*, 254 x 56 x 56 cm
Centre: *First Sight*, 366 x 86 x 86 cm
Right: *Dreamer*, 214 x 92 x 92 cm
stainless steel, copper, brass, aluminium,
plastic and acrylic
Dreamer: Collection National Gallery of
Victoria, Melbourne.

FACING PAGE:

Foreground: *Audio Altec*, 1987
stainless steel, perspex and aluminium,
400 x 76 x 87 cm.

Background top: *Hydra: Intensity Coded*,
1987

Wall: acrylic on canvas, 152 x 152 cm

Shelf: metallic paint on cast aluminium
orbs, 48 x 300 x 15 cm

Background bottom:

Transition of Night, 1984
graphite, acrylic and defraction grating on
canvas, 259 x 168 cm

* * *

Interpretations always fall short.

In this book, this monograph on Robert Owen, I have tried to provide at least some signposts. The work is difficult when it is not reduced to mere allegory. Owen's works are movable pieces of syntax. Religion and Magic are pejorative terms for mental processes with exhausted content. Now perception is left to sociologists and vitalisation to minor shoe moguls. Within the arts though (naturalising human action is played against the humanisation of the natural), we have the memory of human kind in a way no other continuum of culture has kept the useful past. Art provides technique, it is the source of the software that is transforming our lives.

Owen has understood the major historical events of this century – like the de facto transfer of the basis of art from matter to understanding, craft to concept, signified to signifier. At the same time he is deeply entangled in the pleasures of materials: its colours, its textures, its light effects and so on. Indeed he is a rhapsodist of the senses at a time when we are in the business of divorcing the mind from the senses.

Most people, goes the cliché, feel they'd be bored in paradise. With Robert Owen you have the feeling his heaven would consist of a 26 hour day in which he could share the universe with everyone.

* * *

REFERENCES:

- S. Barron & M. Tuchman (eds), *The Avant-Garde in Russia 1910-1930* (1980)
John Barth, "The Perseid" in *Chimera* (1972)
Jean Baudrillard, *Cool Memories 1980-1985* (1985)
Jack Burnham, *The Structure of Art* (1971)
Hollis Frampton (Interview), *Afterimage* 4, Autumn, 1972 (p44ff)
Robert Hughes, *Heaven and Hell in Western Art* (1968)
Yves Klein, *Selected Writings, 1928-1962*, Tate (1974)
C. Levi-Strauss, *The Savage Mind* (1966)
Jack Lindsay, *The Origins of Alchemy in Graeco-Roman Egypt*, (1970)
J-F. Lyotard, "Longitude 180° W or E" in *Arakawa* (1984)
Palinurus, *The Unquiet Grave* (1944)
Octavio Paz, *Alternating Current* (1974)
William Irwin Thompson, *The Time Falling Bodies Take To Light; Mythology, Sexuality and the Origins of Culture* (1981).





Exhibitions, Bibliography, Collections



FACING PAGE:

The Time Falling Bodies Take To Light, 1988

Installation view: City Art Gallery, Wagga Wagga, N.S.W.

Floor: coal, pasivated steel, brass, copper and bronze, 050 x 4.5 x 27.5 metres.

Ceiling: oil and pigment on existing structure, 15 x 104 metres.

Wall: mirror and text, 8.5 cm x 47 metres, *Fire Drawing*, 1964 fire and wax on aluminium, 58 x 37 cm.

Born Sydney, Australia 1937. Studied National Art School, Sydney 1958-62. Lived in Greece 1963-66 and London 1966-75.

Selected Individual Exhibitions

Tolarno Gallery, Melbourne, *Relief Constructions*, 1971 and 1972.

Tolarno Gallery, Melbourne, *Seven Days (Drawings 1966-1974)*, 1974.

Coventry Gallery, Sydney, *Constructions and Drawings*, 1975.

Coventry Gallery, Sydney, *Some Past/Some Future Work*, 1976.

Tolarno Gallery, Melbourne, *Memory & Logic Units*, 1977.

Coventry Gallery, Sydney *Cross Reference* (installation), 1978.

Australian Centre of Photography, Sydney: Solander Gallery, Canberra; Wagga Wagga City Art Gallery, N.S.W.; *Burano, Colour Works*, 1979.

Coventry Gallery, Sydney, *Apposition* (installation), 1980.

Ivan Dougherty Gallery, Sydney, *Plain Images* (installation with Mike Parr), 1981.

The Developed Image, Adelaide and New Zealand Tour, *Burano, Colour Works*, 1981-82.

Coventry Gallery, Sydney, *Hammer on Rock* (sound installation), 1982.

Axiom Gallery, Melbourne, *Colour Works*, 1982.

Art Projects, Melbourne, *From the Centre* (installation), 1983.

Roslyn Oxley9 Gallery, Sydney, *Turn of the Moon and Folds in the Lake of Light and From the Centre* (installation), 1984.

Air and Space Studio, London, *Persephone's Towers*, 1985.

Roslyn Oxley9 Gallery, Sydney, *Resurrections* (installation), 1985.

United Artists Gallery, Melbourne, *Easy Science*, 1987.

Victorian College of the Arts Gallery, Melbourne, *Phase Zone Three (Into the Light)* (installation), 1988.

Institute of Modern Art, Brisbane, *A Warring Peace; A Sweet Wound; A Mild Evil* (installation), 1988.

Wagga Wagga City Art Gallery, N.S.W., *A Retrospective Installation*, 1988.

Artspace Visual Art Centre, Sydney, *A Warring Peace; A Sweet Wound; A Mild Evil* (installation), 1988.

Selected Group Exhibitions

Hyde Park, Sydney, *Transfield Sculpture Exhibition*, 1966.

Marlborough New London Gallery, London, *Small Constructions*, 1968.

Marlborough Fine Art, London; Icon Gallery, Birmingham; Museum of Modern Art, *Constructions*, 1969.

Liverpool City Gallery, Liverpool, *John Moore's Liverpool Exhibition 7*, 1969.

Whitechapel Art Gallery, London, *Three to Infinity*, 1970.



Untitled, 1986
steel, copper, rubber, 40 x 40 x 70 cm.

- Marlborough-Gerson Gallery, New York, *Constructions*, 1970.
- Richard Demarco Gallery, Edinburgh, *Four Australian Artists* (Hessing, Owen, Nolan and Boyd), 1970.
- Gilford Art Gallery, Gilford, *Contemporary British Art*, 1971.
- Marlborough New London Gallery, London, *Constructions*, 1971.
- 38th Venice Biennale, Italy, *From Nature to Art/From Art to Nature*, 1978.
- 7th Mildura Sculpture Triennial, Mildura, 1978.
- Maki & Tamuta Gallery, Tokyo, *Documentation*, 1978.
- 3rd Biennale of Sydney, Sydney, *European Dialogue*, 1979.
- Ewing & George Paton Gallery, Melbourne and Australian Tour, *Frame of Reference*, 1980.
- 1st Australian Sculpture Triennial, Latrobe University, Melbourne, 1981.
- Ewing & George Paton Gallery, Melbourne, *Ten Years*, 1981.
- Ivan Dougherty Gallery, Sydney, *Eight x Two x Three*, 1981.
- Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney, *Australian Perspecta*, 1981.
- Robert McDougall, Art Gallery and Canterbury University, Christchurch, New Zealand, *Anzart-Australian New Zealand Art Encounter*, 1981.
- Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney, *Re-Constructed Vision*, 1981.
- Melville Hall, Australian National University, Canberra, *Australian Art of the Last Ten Years*, 1982.
- National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne, *The Seventies into the Eighties*, 1982.
- Rimini, Italy, *Ambiente*, sound environments, 1982.
- Art Gallery of Western Australia, Perth, *Presence and Absence*, 1983.
- Australian Contemporary Art in Tokyo, Japan, *Continuum '83*, 1983.
- ARC/Musee d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris, France, *D'un autre continent: L'Australie le reve et le reel*, 1983.
- Artspace Visual Arts Centre, Sydney, *Artists Books*, 1983.
- Art Projects, Melbourne, *Drawings (Schematic, Expressionist and Psychological)*, 1983.
- Roslyn Oxley9 Gallery, Sydney, *Dreams and Nightmares*, 1984.
- Art Gallery, London, *Ten Years*, 1985.
- Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney, *Instruments of Art*, Australian Perspecta, 1985.
- Kunsthau Hamburg, West Germany, *Biennale Des Friedens*, 1985.
- Roslyn Oxley9 Gallery, Sydney, *Forbidden Objects*, 1986.
- 6th Biennale of Sydney, Sydney, *Origin, Originality & Beyond*, 1986.
- Heide Park and Art Gallery, Melbourne, *Primal Painting*, 1986.
- Australian Centre of Contemporary Arts, Melbourne, *Geometric Abstraction*, 1986.
- Power Gallery of Contemporary Art, Sydney, *In Print Vol. 1: Artists Books*, 1987.
- Heide Park and Art Gallery, Melbourne, 3rd Australian Sculpture Triennial, 1987.
- University Gallery, University of Melbourne, *What is This Thing Called Science*, 1987.
- Ormond College, University of Melbourne, Melbourne, *Ormond College Welcomes New Art*, 1987.
- Institut Superier Pour L'Etude Du Langage Plastique, Bruxelles, *Plus-Moins-Zero Exhibition*, 1988.
- Selected Bibliography**
- John Russell, *New Names in Britain*, Art in America, September, 1970.
- Daniel Thomas, General Catalogue, 38th Venice Biennale, 1978.
- Roland Millen, *The Venice Biennale*, Art & Australia, Vol. 16/1, 1979.

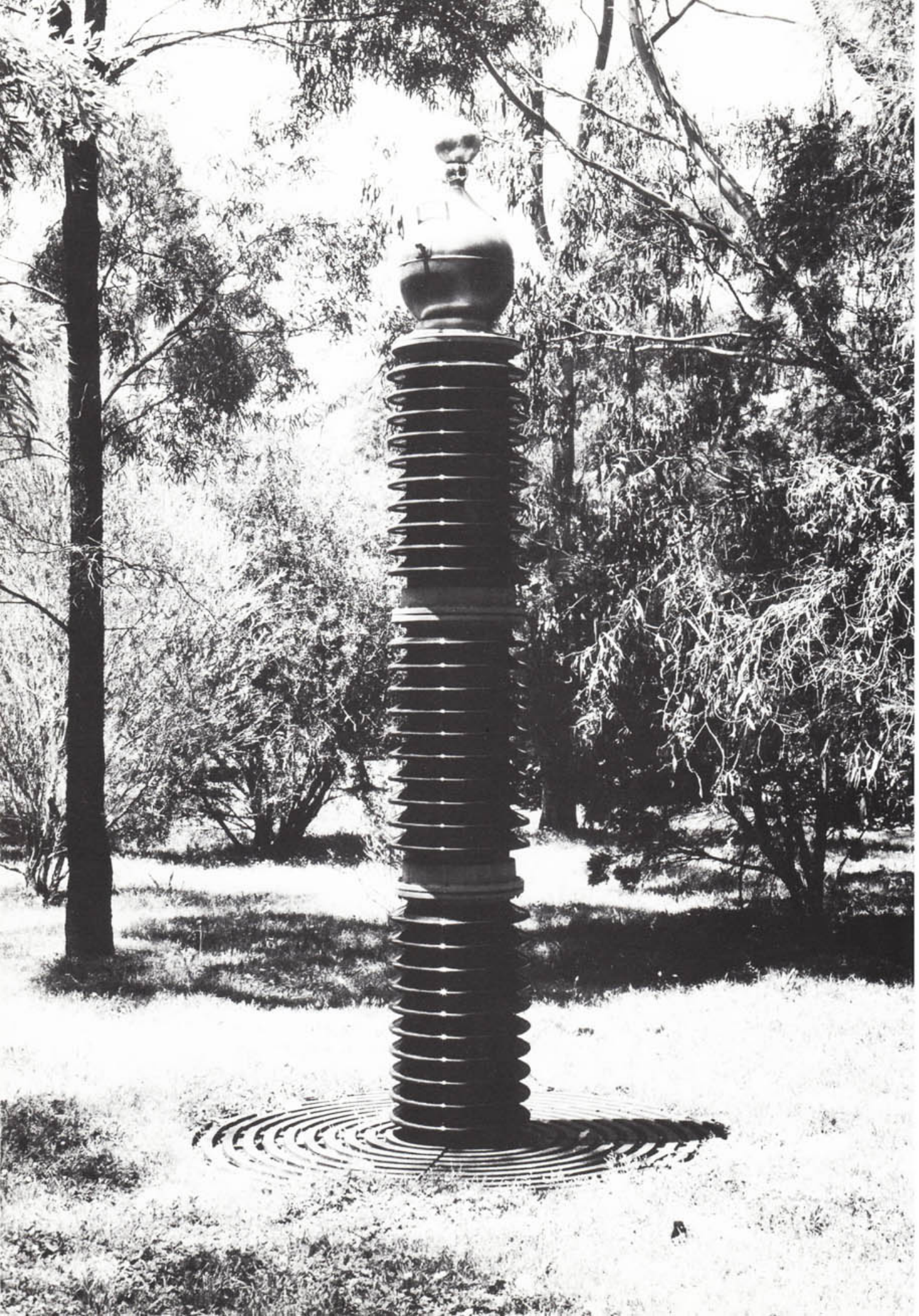


Untitled (for Mondrian), 1969-70
aluminium, perspex and oroglass,
13 x 183 x 183 cm.
Phillip Morris Collection.

- Elwyn Lynn, *The Sydney Biennale*, Art International, Summer, 1979.
- Nick Waterlow, *European Dialogue*, Flash Art, No. 90-91, 1979.
- Pierre Restany, *Advance Australia Fair*, D'ars Periodico d'arte Contemporenae, Vol. XXI No. 92, 1980.
- Ken Scarlett, *Australian Sculpture*, Nelson, 1980.
- Mike Parr, *Robert Owen's Apposition*, Aspect, Vol. 5/2, 1980.
- Robert Owen, *Insert 2, ZX*, No. 6, Winter, 1980.
- Judy Annear, *Frame of Reference* (catalogue), Australian Tour, 1980-1981.
- Suzi Gablik, *Report from Australia*, Art in America, Vol. 169/1, 1981.
- Robert Owen and Mike Parr, *Plain Images* (catalogue), Ivan Dougherty Gallery, 1981.
- Bernice Murphy, *Painting*.
- Jennifer Phipps, *Anzart*, Australian Arts Review, 1982. Ed: Leon Paroissien Warner Associates, Sydney, 1983.
- Nick Waterlow, *The Sydney Biennale*, Art Monthly, No. 57, 1982.
- Elwyn Lynn, Art International, Vol. XXV 5/6, 1982.
- Bruce Adams, *Presence and Absence: The Gallery as Other Place*, Art & Text, No. 10, Winter, 1983.
- Paul Taylor (ed.), *Anything Goes: Art in Australia 1970-1980*, published by Art & Text, Melbourne, 1984.
- George Alexander, *Meditations on Robert Owen* (catalogue), Roslyn Oxley9 Gallery, Sydney, 1984.
- George Alexander, *Australian Perspecta* (catalogue), Sydney, 1985.
- Paul McGillick, *Outlook*, Vogue Australia, December, 1985.
- Pam Hansford, *Robert Owen*, Art in Australia, Vol. 24, No. 2, Summer, 1986.
- Robert Owen, *From Notes to Myself*, Tension, No. 9, 1986.
- Pam Hansford, 6th Biennale of Sydney (catalogue), Sydney, 1986.
- Thomas McEvilley, *6th Biennale of Sydney*, Artforum, November, 1986.
- Tony Clark (curator), *Ormond College Welcomes New Art* (catalogue), Ormond College, 1987.
- Naomi Cass (curator), *What is this Thing Called Science* (catalogue), University Gallery, University of Melbourne, 1987.
- Xposure*, Express, November/December, 1987.
- Robert Owen (ed.), *Phase Zone Three (Into the Light)*, 1988.
- Robert Owen, *Hiatus #2*, Plus-Moins-Zero, Revue d'art Contemporain, Bruxelles, No. 50, 1988.
- Robert Owen, *Doubtful Matter*, Kerb Your Dog, No. 3, 1988.
- Sue Cramer and George Alexander, *A Warring Peace; A Sweet Wound; A Mild Evil* (catalogue), IMA Brisbane, May, 1988.

Collections

Australian National Gallery, Canberra;
Art Gallery of New South Wales;
Art Gallery of Queensland;
Art Gallery of Western Australia;
National Gallery of Victoria;
Museum and Art Gallery of Tasmania;
New Parliament House, Canberra;
Wagga Wagga City Art Gallery, N.S.W.;
Wollongong City Art Gallery, N.S.W.;
Armidale City Art Gallery, N.S.W.;
Newcastle City Art Gallery, N.S.W.;
Mildura City Art Gallery, Victoria;
Phillip Morris Collection;
National Bank of Australasia;
Archivio Arti Contemporanee, Venice;
Polaroid Collection, Amsterdam;
Banque National De Paris, Paris;
National Museum of Contemporary Art, Seoul, Korea.



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FACING PAGE:

Three Too Infinity, 1987

steel, ceramic, cast iron, aluminium and gilded bronze, 381 x 200 x 200 cm.

Collection National Museum of Contemporary Art, Seoul Olympic Park, Korea.



'Moonlight is sculpture; sunlight is painting'
NATHANIEL HAWTHORNE

